THE LADDER OF DIVINE ASCENT

St. John Climacus
Translated by Archimandrite Lazarus Moore (Harper & Brothers, 1959)

An Ascetic Treatise by Abba John, Abbot of the monks of Mount Sinai, sent by him to Abba John, Abbot of Raithu, at whose request it was written.

Step 1

On renunciation of the world

1. Our God and King is good, ultra-good and all-good (it is best to begin with God in writing to the servants of God). Of the rational beings created by Him and honoured with the dignity of free-will, some are His friends, others are His true servants, some are worthless, some are completely estranged from God, and others, though feeble creatures are equally His opponents. By friends of God, dear and holy Father,[1] we simple people mean, properly speaking, those intellectual and incorporeal beings which surround God. By true servants of God we mean all those who tirelessly and unremittingly do and have done His will. By worthless servants we mean those who think of themselves as having been granted baptism, but have not faithfully kept the vows they made to God. By those estranged from God and alienated from Him, we mean those who are unbelievers or heretics. Finally, the enemies of God are those who have not only evaded and rejected the Lord's commandment themselves, but who also wage bitter war on those who are fulfilling it.

2. Each of the classes mentioned above might well have a special treatise devoted to it. But for simple folk like us it would not be profitable at this point to enter into such lengthy investigations. Come then, in unquestioning obedience let us stretch out our unworthy hand to the true servants of God who devoutly compel us and in their faith constrain us by their commands. Let us write this treatise with a pen taken from their knowledge and dipped in the ink of humility which is both subdued yet radiant. Then let us apply it to the smooth white paper of their hearts, or rather rest it on the tablets of the spirit, and let us inscribe the divine words (or rather sow the seeds).[2] And let us begin like this.

3. God belongs to all free beings. He is the life of all, the salvation of all—faithful and unfaithful, just and unjust, pious and impious, passionate and dispassionate, monks and seculars, wise and simple, healthy and sick, young and old—just as the diffusion of light, the sight of the sun, and the changes of the weather are for all alike; 'for there is no respect of persons with God'.[3]

4. The irreligious man is a mortal being with a rational nature, who of his own free will turns his back on life and thinks of his own Maker, the ever-existent, as non-existent. The lawless man is one who holds the law of God after his own depraved fashion,[4] and thinks to combine faith in God with heresy that is directly opposed to Him. The Christian is one who imitates Christ in thought, word and deed, as far as is possible for human beings, believing rightly and blamelessly in the Holy Trinity. The lover of God is he who lives in communion with all that is natural and sinless, and as far as he is able neglects nothing good. The continent man is he who in the midst of temptations, snares and turmoil, strives with all his might to imitate the ways of Him who is free from such. The monk is he who within his earthly and soiled body toils towards the rank and state of the incorporeal beings.[5] A monk is he who strictly controls his nature and unceasingly watches over his senses. A monk is he who keeps his body

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[1] Lit. 'head', Gk. *kephale*, commonly used as a term of endearment.
[2] The words in parenthesis only occur in some texts.
[3] Romans ii, II
[4] Cf. Romans i, 18.
[5] Angels. Lit. 'bodiless ones'.

in chastity, his mouth pure and his mind illumined. A monk is a mourning soul that both asleep and awake is unceasingly occupied with the remembrance of death. Withdrawal from the world is voluntary hatred of vaunted material things and denial of nature for the attainment of what is above nature.

5. . All who have willingly left the things of the world, have certainly done so either for the sake of the future Kingdom, or because of the multitude of their sins, or for love of God. If they were not moved by any of these reasons their withdrawal from the world was unreasonable. But God who sets our contests waits to see what the end of our course will be.

6. The man who has withdrawn from the world in order to shake off his own burden of sins, should imitate those who sit outside the city amongst the tombs, and should not discontinue his hot and fiery streams of tears and voiceless heartfelt groanings until he, too, sees that Jesus has come to him and rolled away the stone of hardness[1] from his heart, and loosed Lazarus, that is to say, our mind, from the bands of sin, and ordered His attendant angels: Loose him[2] from passions, and let him go to blessed dispassion.[3] Otherwise he will have gained nothing.

7. Those of us who wish to go out of Egypt and to fly from Pharaoh, certainly need some Moses as a mediator with God and from God, who, standing between action and contemplation, will raise hands of prayer for us to God, so that guided by Him we may cross the sea of sin and rout the Amalek of the passions.[4] That is why those who have surrendered themselves to God, deceive themselves if they suppose that they have no need of a director. Those who came out of Egypt had Moses as their guide, and those who fled from Sodom had an angel.[5] The former are like those who are healed of the passions of the soul by the care of physicians: these are they who come out of Egypt. The latter are like those who long to put off the uncleanness of the wretched body. That is why they need a helper, an angel, so to speak, or at least one equal to an angel. For in proportion to the corruption of our wounds we need a director who is indeed an expert and a physician.

8. Those who aim at ascending with the body to heaven, need violence indeed and constant suffering[6] especially in the early stages of their renunciation, until our pleasure-loving dispositions and unfeeling hearts attain to love of God and chastity by visible sorrow. A great toil, very great indeed, with much unseen suffering, especially for those who live carelessly, until by simplicity, deep angerlessness and diligence, we make our mind, which is a greedy kitchen dog addicted to barking, a lover of chastity and watchfulness. But let us who are weak and passionate have the courage to offer our infirmity and natural weakness to Christ with unhesitating faith, and confess it to Him; and we shall be certain to obtain His help, even beyond our merit, if only we unceasingly go right down to the depth of humility.

9. All who enter upon the good fight, which is hard and narrow, but also easy, must realize that they must leap into the fire, if they really expect the celestial fire to dwell in them. But, let everyone examine himself, and so let him eat the bread of it with its bitter herbs, and let him drink the cup of it with its

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[1] I.e. blindness, obtuseness.

[2] St. John xi, 44.

[3] 'Dispassion': Gk. *apatheia*, which is often misunderstood and mistranslated as 'apathy', 'indifference', or 'insensibility' in a Stoic sense. In ecclesiastical Greek, 'dispassion' means freedom from passion through being filled with the Holy Spirit of God as a fruit of divine love. It is a state of soul in which a burning love for God and men leaves no room for selfish and animal passions. How far it is from the cold Stoic conception may be seen from the fact that St. Diadochus can speak of 'the fire of dispassion'. Cf. Step 28: 27. Throughout this translation *apatheia* is usually given as 'dispassion'.

[4] Exodus xvii.

[5] Genesis xix.

[6] Cf. St. Matthew xi, 12.

tears, lest his service lead to his own judgment. If everyone who has been baptized has not been saved—I shall be silent about what follows.[1]

10. Those who enter this contest must renounce all things, despise all things, deride all things, and shake off all things, that they may lay a firm foundation. A good foundation of three layers and three pillars is innocence, fasting and temperance. Let all babes in Christ begin with these virtues, taking as their model the natural babes. For you never find in them anything sly or deceitful. They have no insatiate appetite, no insatiable stomach, no body on fire; but perhaps as they grow, in proportion as they take more food, their natural passions also increase.

11. To lag in the fight at the very outset of the struggle and thereby to furnish proof of our coming defeat[2] is a very hateful and dangerous thing. A firm beginning will certainly be useful for us when we later grow slack. A soul that is strong at first but then relaxes is spurred on by the memory of its former zeal. And in this way new wings are often obtained.

12. When the soul betrays itself and loses the blessed and longed for fervour, let it carefully investigate the reason for losing this. And let it arm itself with all its longing and zeal against whatever has caused this. For the former fervour can return only through the same door through which it was lost.

13. The man who renounces the world from fear is like burning incense, that begins with fragrance but ends in smoke. He who leaves the world through hope of reward is like a millstone, that always moves in the same way.[3] But he who withdraws from the world out of love for God has obtained fire at the very outset; and, like fire set to fuel, it soon kindles a larger fire.

14. Some build bricks upon stones. Others set pillars on the bare ground. And there are some who go a short distance and, having got their muscles and joints warm, go faster. Whoever can understand, let him understand this allegorical word.

15. Let us eagerly run our course as men called by our God and King, lest, since our time is short, we be found in the day of our death without fruit and perish of hunger. Let us please the Lord as soldiers please their king; because we are required to give an exact account of our service after the campaign. Let us fear the Lord not less than we fear beasts. For I have seen men who were going to steal and were not afraid of God, but, hearing the barking of dogs, they at once turned back; and what the fear of God could not achieve was done by the fear of animals. Let us love God at least as much as we respect our friends. For I have often seen people who had offended God and were not in the least perturbed about it. And I have seen how those same people provoked their friends in some trifling matter and then employed every artifice, every device, every sacrifice, every apology, both personally and through friends and relatives, not sparing gifts, in order to regain their former love.

16. In the very beginning of our renunciation, it is certainly with labour and grief that we practise the virtues. But when we have made progress in them, we no longer feel sorrow, or we feel little sorrow. But as soon as our mortal mind is consumed, and mastered by our alacrity, we practise them with all joy and eagerness, with love and with divine fire.

17. Those who at once from the very outset follow the virtues and fulfil the commandments with joy and alacrity certainly deserve praise. And in the same way those who spend a long time in asceticism[4] and still find it a weariness to obey the commandments, if they obey them at all, certainly deserve pity.

18. Let us not even abhor or condemn the renunciation due merely to circumstances. I have seen men who had fled into exile meet the emperor by accident when he was on tour, and then join his company, enter his palace, and dine with him. I have seen seed casually fall on the earth and bear plenty of

[1] This means: 'If every baptized person is not saved, so the same can be said about monks—not all who have made the vow are real monks and will be saved. But I prefer to pass over this matter in silence.'

[2] Lit. 'slaughter'.

[3] That is, revolves round itself, is self-centred.

[4] This might also be translated: 'dawdle over their training'.

thriving fruit. And I have seen the opposite, too. I have also seen a person come to a hospital with some other motive, but the courtesy and kindness of the physician overcame him, and on being treated with an astringent, he got rid of the darkness that lay on his eyes. Thus for some the unintentional was stronger and more sure than what was intentional in others.

19. Let no one, by appealing to the weight and multitude of his sins, say that he is unworthy of the monastic vow, and for love of pleasure disparage himself, excusing himself with excuses in his sins.[1] Where there is much corruption, considerable treatment is needed to draw out all the impurity. The healthy do not go to a hospital.

20. 20. If an earthly king were to call us and request us to serve in his presence, we should not delay for other orders, we should not make excuses, but we should leave everything and eagerly go to him. Let us then be on the alert, lest when the King of kings and Lord of lords and God of gods calls us to this heavenly office, we cry off out of sloth and cowardice and find ourselves without excuse at the Last Judgment. It is possible to walk, even when tied with the fetters of worldly affairs and iron cares, but only with difficulty. For even those who have iron chains on their feet can often walk; but they are continually stumbling and getting hurt. An unmarried man, who is only tied to the world by business affairs, is like one who has fetters on his hands; and therefore when he wishes to enter the monastic life he has nothing to hinder him. But the married man is like one who is bound hand and foot. (So when he wants to run he cannot.)[2]

21. Some people living carelessly in the world have asked me: 'We have wives and are beset with social cares, and how can we lead the solitary life?' I replied to them: 'Do all the good you can; do not speak evil of anyone; do not steal from anyone; do not lie to anyone; do not be arrogant towards anyone; do not hate any one; be sure you go to church; be compassionate to the needy; do not offend anyone; do not wreck another man's domestic happiness;[3] and be content with what your own wives can give you. If you behave in this way you will not be far from the Kingdom of Heaven.'

22. Let us charge into the good fight with joy and love without being afraid of our enemies. Though unseen themselves, they can look at the face of our soul, and if they see it altered by fear, they take up arms against us all the more fiercely. For the cunning creatures have observed that we are scared. So let us take up arms against them courageously. No one will fight with a resolute fighter.

23. The Lord designedly makes easy the battles of beginners so that they should not immediately return to the world at the outset. And so rejoice in the Lord always, all servants of His, detecting in this the first sign of the Master's love for us, and a sign that He Himself has called us. But when God sees courageous souls, He has often been known to act in this way: He lets them have conflicts from the very beginning in order to crown them the sooner. But the Lord hides the difficulty[4] of this contest from those in the world. For if they were to know, no one would renounce the world.

24. Offer to Christ the labours of your youth, and in your old age you will rejoice in the wealth of dispassion. What is gathered in youth nourishes and comforts those who are tired out in old age. In our youth let us labour ardently and let us run vigilantly, for the hour of death is unknown. We have very evil and dangerous, cunning, unscrupulous foes, who hold fire in their hands and try to burn the temple of God with the flame that is in it. These foes are strong; they never sleep; they are incorporeal and invisible. Let no one when he is young listen to his enemies, the demons, when they say to him: 'Do not wear out your flesh lest you make it sick and weak.' For you will scarcely find anyone, especially in the present generation, who is determined to mortify his flesh, although he might deprive

[1] Psalm cxl, 4. The meaning is that in the midst of his sins he makes excuses for not becoming a monk. The excuses are not for his sins, but his sins are his excuses.

[2] The words in parenthesis are missing in some versions and may be an interpolation.

[3] Lit. 'go near the bed of another'.

[4] Some texts add: 'or rather, the easiness'.

himself of many pleasant dishes. The aim of this demon is to make the very outset of our spiritual life lax and negligent, and then make the end correspond to the beginning.

25. Those who have really determined to serve Christ, with the help of spiritual fathers and their own self-knowledge will strive before all else to choose a place, and a way of life, and a habitation, and exercises suitable for them. For community life is not for all, on account of greed; and not for all are places of solitude, on account of anger. But each will consider what is most suited to his needs.

26. The whole monastic state consists of three specific kinds of establishment: either the retirement and solitude of a spiritual athlete, or living in silence with one or two others, or settling patiently in a community. Turn not to the right hand nor to the left,[1] but follow the King's highway.[2] Of the three ways of life stated above, the second is suitable for many people, for it is said: 'Woe unto him who is alone when he falleth' into despondency or lethargy or laziness or despair, 'and hath not another among men to lift him up'. [3]'For where two or three are gathered in My name, there am I in the midst of them,' said the Lord.[4]

27. So who is a faithful and wise monk? He who has kept his fervour unabated, and to the end of his life has not ceased daily to add fire to fire, fervour to fervour, zeal to zeal, love to love.[5]

This is the first step. Let him who has set foot on it not turn back.

Step 2

On detachment

1. The man who really loves the Lord, who has made a real effort to find the coming Kingdom, who has really begun to be troubled by his sins, who is really mindful of eternal torment and judgment, who really lives in fear of his own departure, will not love, care or worry about money, or possessions, or parents, or worldly glory, or friends, or brothers, or anything at all on earth. But having shaken off all ties with earthly things and having stripped himself of all his cares, and having come to hate even his own flesh, and having stripped himself of everything, he will follow Christ without anxiety or hesitation, always looking heavenward and expecting help from there, according to the word of the holy man: My soul sticks close behind Thee,[6] and according to the ever-memorable author who said: I have not wearied of following Thee, nor have I desired the day (or rest) of man, O Lord.[7]

2. After our call, which comes from God and not man, we have left all that is mentioned above, and it is a great disgrace for us to worry about anything that cannot help us in the hour of our need—that is to say, the hour of our death. For as the Lord said, this means looking back and not being fit for the Kingdom of Heaven.[8] Knowing how fickle we novices are and how easily we turn to the world through visiting, or being with, worldly people, when someone said to Him: 'Suffer me first to go and bury my father,' our Lord replied, 'Leave the dead to bury their own dead.'[9]

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[1] Proverbs iv, 28.

[2] Numbers xx, 57.

[3] Ecclesiastes iv, 10.

[4] St. Matthew xviii, 20.

[5] The order of these words varies in different MSS.

[6] Psalm lxii, 9. (R.V. Psalm lxiii, 8); 'My soul followeth hard after Thee'. Using the Old Latin, *Agglutinata est anima mea post Te*, my soul is glued behind Thee, St. Augustine asks: 'What is that glue? It is love.' And St. Chrysostom compares this close union to the nails of the Cross.

[7] Jeremiah xvii, 16.

[8] St. Luke ix, 62.

[9] St. Matthew viii, 22.

3. After our renunciation of the world, the demons suggest to us that we should envy those living in the world who are merciful and compassionate, and be sorry for ourselves as deprived of these virtues. The aim of our foes is, by false humility, either to make us return to the world, or, if we remain monks, to plunge us into despair. It is possible to belittle those living in the world out of conceit; and it is also possible to disparage them behind their backs in order to avoid despair and to obtain hope.

4. Let us listen to what the Lord said to the young man who had fulfilled nearly all the commandments: 'One thing thou lackest; sell what thou hast and give to the poor[1] and become a beggar who receives alms from others.'

5. Having resolved to run our race with ardour and fervour, let us consider carefully how the Lord gave judgment concerning all living in the world, speaking of even those who are alive as 'dead', when He said to someone: Leave those in the world who are 'dead' to bury the dead in body.[2] His wealth did not in the least prevent the young man from being baptized. And so it is in vain that some say that the Lord commanded him to sell what he had for the sake of baptism. This[3] is more than sufficient to give us the most firm assurance of the surpassing glory of our vow.

6. It is worth investigating why those who live in the world and spend their life in vigils, fasts, labours and hardships, when they withdraw from the world and begin the monastic life, as if at some trial or on the practising ground, no longer continue the discipline of their former spurious and sham asceticism. I have seen how in the world they planted many different plants of the virtues, which were watered by vainglory as by an underground sewage pipe, and were hoed by ostentation, and for manure were heaped with praise. But when transplanted to a desert soil, in accessible to people of the world and so not manured with the foul-smelling water of vanity, they withered at once. For water-loving plants are not such as to produce fruit in hard and arid training fields.

7. The man who has come to hate the world has escaped sorrow. But he who has an attachment to anything visible is not yet delivered from grief. For how is it possible not to be sad at the loss of something we love? We need to have great vigilance in all things. But we must give our whole attention to this above everything else. I have seen many people in the world, who by reason of cares, worries, occupations and vigils, avoided the wild desires of their body. But after entering the monastic life, and in complete freedom from anxiety, they polluted themselves in a pitiful way by the disturbing demands of the body.

8. Let us pay close attention to ourselves so that we are not deceived into thinking that we are following the strait and narrow way when in actual fact we are keeping to the wide and broad way. The following will show you what the narrow way means: mortification of the stomach, all-night standing, water in moderation, short rations of bread, the purifying draught of dishonour, sneers, derision, insults, the cutting out of one's own will, patience in annoyances, unmurmuring endurance of scorn, disregard of insults, and the habit, when wronged, of bearing it sturdily; when slandered, of not being indignant; when humiliated, not to be angry; when condemned, to be humble. Blessed are they who follow the way we have just described, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.[4]

9. No one will enter the heavenly bridechamber wearing a crown unless he makes the first, second and third renunciation. I mean the renunciation of all business, and people, and parents; the cutting out of one's will; and the third renunciation, of the conceit that dogs obedience. 'Come ye out from among them, and be ye separate,' saith the Lord, 'and touch not the unclean world.'[5] For who amongst them has ever worked any miracles? Who has raised the dead? Who has driven out devils? No one. All these

[1] St. Mark x, 21.

[2] St. Matthew viii, 22.

[3] I.e. the story of the rich young man.

[4] St. Matthew v, 3—12.

[5] 2 Corinthians vi, 17.

are the victorious rewards of monks, rewards which the world cannot receive; and if it could, then what is the need of asceticism or solitude?

10. After our renunciation, when the demons inflame our hearts by reminding us of our parents and brethren, then let us arm ourselves against them with prayer, and let us inflame ourselves with the remembrance of the eternal fire, so that by reminding ourselves of this, we may quench the untimely fire of our heart.

11. If anyone thinks he is without attachment to some object, but is grieved at its loss, then he is completely deceiving himself.

12. If young people who are prone to the desires of physical love and to luxurious ways wish to enter the monastic life, let them exercise themselves in all fasting and prayer, and persuade themselves to abstain from all luxury and vice, lest their last state be worse than the first.[1] This harbour provides safety, but also exposes one to danger. Those who sail the spiritual seas know this. But it is a pitiful sight to behold those who have survived perils at sea suffering shipwreck in harbour.

This is the second step. Let those who run the race imitate not Lot's wife but Lot himself, and flee.

Step 3

On exile or pilgrimage[2]

1. Exile means that we leave forever everything in our own country that prevents us from reaching the goal of the religious life. Exile means modest manners, wisdom which remains unknown, prudence not recognized as such by most, a hidden life, an invisible intention, unseen meditation, desire for humiliation, longing for hardship, constant determination to love God, abundance of charity, renunciation of vainglory, depth of silence.

2. Those who have come to love the Lord are at first unceasingly and greatly disturbed by this thought, as if burning with divine fire. I speak of separation from their own, undertaken by the lovers of perfection so that they may live a life of hardship and simplicity. But great and praiseworthy as this is, yet it requires great discretion; for not every kind of exile, carried to extremes, is good.

3. If every prophet goes unhonoured in his own country,[3] as the Lord says, then let us beware lest our exile should be for us an occasion of vainglory. For exile is separation from everything in order to keep the mind inseparable from God. Exile loves and produces continual weeping. An exile is a fugitive from every attachment to his own people and to strangers.

4. In hastening to solitude and exile, do not wait for world-loving souls, because the thief comes unexpectedly. In trying to save the careless and indolent along with themselves, many perish with them, because in course of time the fire goes out. As soon as the flame is burning within you, run; for you do not know when it will go out and leave you in darkness. Not all of us are required to save others. The divine Apostle says: 'Each one of us shall give account of himself to God.'[4] And again he

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[1] St. Matthew xii, 45.

[2] This is a double translation for a single Greek word *xeniteia* which means 'living as a stranger' (not necessarily as a vagrant) and might be translated 'unworldliness'. But several considerations, notably paragraphs 6 and 22 of this chapter, have led me to think that in our author's time the word contained a notion of movement also, and might be rendered 'pilgrimage'. However, in the text we have kept to the word 'exile'.

[3] St. John iv, 44.

[4] Romans xiv, 12.

says: 'Thou therefore who teachest another, teachest thou not thyself?'[1] This is like saying: I do not know whether we must all teach others; but teach yourselves at all costs.

5. In going into exile, beware of the demon of wandering and of sensual desire; because exile gives him his opportunity.

6. Detachment is excellent; but her mother is exile. Having become an exile for the Lord's sake, we should have no ties of affection at all lest we seem to be roving in order to gratify our passions.

7. Have you become an exile from the world? Do not touch the world any more; because the passions desire nothing better than to return.

8. Eve was exiled from Paradise against her will, but the monk is a willing exile from his home. She would have liked the tree of disobedience again; and he would certainly expose himself to frequent danger from relatives according to the flesh.

9. Run from places of sin as from the plague. For when fruit is not present, we have no frequent desire to eat it.

10. Be on the look out for this trick and wile of the thieves. For they suggest to us that we need not separate ourselves from people in the world and maintain that we shall receive a great reward if we can look upon women and still remain continent. We must not believe these suggestions, but rather the opposite.

11. When we have lived a year or two away from our family, and have acquired some piety or contrition or continence, then vain thoughts begin to rise up in us and urge us to go again to our homeland, 'for the edification of many', they say, 'and as an example, and for the profit of those who saw our former lax life'. And if we possess the gift of eloquence and some shreds of knowledge, the thought occurs to us that we could be saviours of souls and teachers in the world—that we may waste in the sea what we have gathered so well in the harbour. Let us try to imitate not Lot's wife, but Lot himself. For when a soul turns back to what it has left, like salt, it loses its savour and becomes henceforth useless. Run from Egypt without looking back; because the hearts which look back upon it with affection shall not see Jerusalem, the land of tranquility.[2]' Those who left their own people in childlike simplicity at the beginning, and have since been completely purified may profitably return to their former land, perhaps even with the intention, after saving themselves, of saving others, too. Yet Moses, who was allowed to see God Himself and was sent by God for the salvation of his own people, met many dangers in Egypt, that is to say, dark nights in the world.

12. It is better to grieve our parents than the Lord. For He has created and saved us, but they have often ruined their loved ones and delivered them up to their doom.

13. He is an exile who, having knowledge, sits like one of foreign speech amongst people of another tongue.

14. It is not from hatred that we separate ourselves from our own people or places (God forbid!), but to avoid the harm which might come to us from them. In this, as in everything else, it is Christ who teaches us what is good for us. For it is clear that He often left His parents according to the flesh. And when He was told, 'Thy Mother and Thy brethren are seeking for Thee', our good Lord and Master at once showed us an example of dispassionate[3] hatred when He said, 'My Mother and My brethren are they who do the will of My Father who is in heaven'.[4]

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[1] Romans ii, 21.

[2] 'Dispassion', Gk. *apatheia*. Jerusalem means 'City of Peace'. The only true peace is freedom from passion, and the technical word for this is 'dispassion'.

[3] *apathes*, i.e. free from human emotions and feelings.

[4] St. Matthew xii, 49.

15. Let him be your father who is able and willing to labour with you in bearing the burden of your sins; and your mother—contrition, which can cleanse you from impurity; and your brother—your comrade who toils and fights side by side with you in your striving toward the heights. Acquire an inseparable wife—the remembrance of death. And let your beloved children be the sighs of your heart. Make your body your slave; and your friends, the Holy Powers (Angels) who can help you at the hour of your death, if they become your friends. This is the generation (family) of those who seek the Lord.[1]

16. Love of God extinguishes our love for our parents. And so he who says that he has both deceives himself. He should listen to Him who says: No man can serve two masters.[2] I have not come, says the Lord, to bring peace on earth (that is, love of parents among sons and brothers who have resolved to serve Me) but war and a sword[3] in order to separate lovers of God from lovers of the world, the material from the spiritual, the proud from the humble. For strife and separation delight the Lord when they spring from love for Himself.

17. Look, beware, lest you be exposed to the deluge of sentiment through your attachment to the things of your home, and all that you have be drowned in the waters of earthly affection. Do not be moved by the tears of parents or friends; otherwise you will be weeping eternally. When they surround you like bees, or rather wasps, and shed tears over you, do not for one moment hesitate, but sternly fix the eye of your soul on your past actions and your death, that you may ward off one sorrow by another. Our own, or more correctly, those who are not our own, flatteringly promise to do everything to please us. But their aim is to hinder our splendid course, and afterwards to bend us in this way to their own ends.

18. For our solitary life let us choose places where there are fewer opportunities for comfort and ambition, but more for humility. Otherwise, we shall be fleeing in company with our passions.

19. Hide your noble birth and do not glory in your distinction, lest you be found to be one thing in word and another in deed.

20. No one has gone into exile so nobly as that great patriarch[4] to whom it was said: 'Get thee out of thy country and from thy kindred and from thy father's house.'[5] And then he was ordered to go into a foreign and barbarous land.

21. Sometimes the Lord has brought more glory to the man who has gone into exile after the manner of this great patriarch. But even if glory is God-given, yet it is excellent to divert it from oneself with the shield of humility.

22. When men or devils praise us for our exile, as for some great success, then let us think of Him who for our sake was exiled from heaven to earth, and we shall find that throughout all eternity it is impossible for us to make return for this.

23. Attachment either to some particular relative or to strangers is dangerous. Little by little it can entice us back to the world, and completely quench the fire of our contrition. It is impossible to look at the sky with one eye and at the earth with the other, and it is equally impossible for anyone not to expose his soul to danger who has not separated himself completely, both in thought and body, from his own relatives and from others.

24. By much labour and effort a good and firm disposition is developed in us. But what is achieved with great labour can be lost in an instant. 'For evil company doth corrupt good manners'[6], being at once worldly and disorderly.[7] The man who associates with people of the world or approaches them

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[1] Psalm xxiii, 6.
[2] St. Matthew vi, 24.
[3] St. Matthew x, 34.
[4] Abraham.
[5] Genesis xii, 1.
[6] 1 Corinthians xv, 33.
[7] 'Worldly and disorderly', a pun on *kosmos*, 'world' and *akosmos*, 'disorder'.

after his renunciation will certainly either fall into their traps or will defile his heart by thinking about them; or if he is not defiled himself yet by condemning those who are defiled, he too will himself be defiled.

Concerning dreams that beginners have

25. It is impossible to hide the fact that our mind, which is the organ of knowledge, is extremely imperfect and full of all kinds of ignorance. The palate distinguishes different foods, the hearing discerns thoughts, the sun reveals the weakness of the eyes, and words betray a soul's ignorance. But the law of love is an incentive to attempt things that are beyond our capacity. And so I think (but I do not dogmatize) that after a chapter on exile, or rather in this very chapter, something should be inserted about dreams, so that we may not be in the dark concerning this trickery of our wily foes.

26. A dream is a movement of the mind while the body is at rest. A phantasy is an illusion of the eyes when the intellect is asleep. A phantasy is an ecstasy of the mind when the body is awake. A phantasy is the appearance of something which does not exist in reality.

27. The reason why we have decided to speak about dreams here is obvious. When we leave our home and relatives for the Lord's sake, and sell ourselves into exile for the love of God, then the devils try to disturb us with dreams, representing to us that our relatives are either grieving or dying, or are captive for our sake and destitute. But he who believes in dreams is like a person running after his own shadow and trying to catch it.

28. The demons of vainglory prophesy in dreams. Being unscrupulous, they guess the future and foretell it to us. When these visions come true, we are amazed; and we are indeed elated with the thought that we are already near to the gift of foreknowledge. A demon is often a prophet to those who believe him, but he is always a liar to those who despise him. Being a spirit he sees what is happening in the lower air, and noticing that someone is dying, he foretells it to the more credulous types of people through dreams. But the demons know nothing about the future from foreknowledge. For if they did, then the sorcerers would also have been able to foretell our death.

29. Devils often transform themselves into angels of light and take the form of martyrs, and make it appear to us during sleep that we are in communication with them. Then, when we wake up, they plunge us into unholy joy and conceit. But you can detect their deceit by this very fact. For angels reveal torments, judgments and separations; and when we wake up we find that we are trembling and sad. As soon as we begin to believe the devils in dreams, then they make sport of us when we are awake, too. He who believes in dreams is completely inexperienced. But he who distrusts all dreams is a wise man. Only believe dreams that foretell torments and judgment for you. But if despair afflicts you, then such dreams are also from devils.

This is the third step, which is equal in number to the Trinity. He who has reached it, let him not look to the right hand nor to the left.

Step 4

On blessed and ever-memorable obedience

1. Our treatise now appropriately touches upon warriors[1] and athletes of Christ. As the flower precedes the fruit, so exiles[2] either of body or will always precedes obedience. For with the help of

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[1] Gk. *puktai*, 'prizefighters'.

[2] Exile appears to be essentially equivalent to detachment.

these two virtues, the holy soul steadily ascends to heaven as upon golden wings. And perhaps it was about this that he who had received the Holy Spirit sang: Who will give me wings like a dove? And I will fly by activity, and be at rest by contemplation and humility.[1]

2. But let us not fail, if you agree, to describe clearly in our treatise the weapons of these brave warriors: how they hold the shield of faith in God and their trainer,[2] and with it they ward off, so to speak, every thought of unbelief and vacillation; how they constantly raise the drawn sword of the Spirit and slay every wish of their own that approaches them; how, clad in the iron armour of meekness and patience, they avert every insult and injury and missile. And for a helmet of salvation they have their superior's protection through prayer. And they do not stand with their feet together, for one is stretched out in service and the other is immovable in prayer.

3. Obedience is absolute renunciation of our own life, clearly expressed in our bodily actions. Or, conversely, obedience is the mortification of the limbs while the mind remains alive. Obedience is unquestioning movement, voluntary death, simple life, carefree danger, spontaneous defence by God, fearlessness of death, a safe voyage, a sleeper's progress. Obedience is the tomb of the will and the resurrection of humility. A corpse does not argue or reason as to what is good or what seems to be bad. For he who has devoutly put the soul of the novice to death will answer for everything. Obedience is an abandonment of discernment in a wealth of discernment.

4. The beginning of the mortification both of the soul's desire and of the bodily members involves much hard work. The middle sometimes means much hard work and is sometimes painless. But the end is insensibility and insusceptibility to toil and pain. Only when he sees himself doing his own will does this blessed living corpse feel sorry and sick at heart; and he fears the responsibility of using his own judgment.

5. You who have decided to strip for the arena of this spiritual confession, you who wish to take on your neck the yoke of Christ, you who are therefore trying to lay your own burden on Another's shoulders, you who are hastening to sign a pledge that you are voluntarily surrendering yourself to slavery, and in return want freedom written to your account, you who are being supported by the hands of others as you swim across this great sea—you should know that you have decided to travel by a short but rough way, from which there is only one deflection, and it is called singularity.[3] But he who has renounced this entirely, even in things that seem to be good and spiritual and pleasing to God, has reached the end before setting out on his journey. For obedience is distrust of oneself in everything, however good it may be, right up to the end of one's life.

6. When motives of humility and real longing for salvation decide us to bend our neck and entrust ourselves to another in the Lord, before entering upon this life, if there is any vice and pride in us, we ought first to question and examine, and even, so to speak, test our helmsman, so as not to mistake the sailor for the pilot, a sick man for a doctor, a passionate for a dispassionate man, the sea for a harbour, and so bring about the speedy shipwreck of our soul. But when once we have entered the arena of religion and obedience we must no longer judge our good manager[4] in any way at all, even though we may perhaps see in him some slight failings, since he is only human. Otherwise, by sitting in judgment we shall get no profit from our subjection.

7. It is absolutely indispensable for those of us who wish to retain undoubting faith in our superiors to write their good deeds indelibly in our hearts and constantly remember them, so that when the demons sow among us distrust towards them, we may be able to silence them by what is preserved in our memory. For the more faith flourishes in the heart, the more alacrity the body has in service. But he

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[1] Psalm liv, 7.
[2] Gk. *gymnastēs*, the trainer of athletes. Here it refers to the spiritual director or superior
[3] Or, 'self-rule', 'self-will', 'independence', 'setting your own pace'; Gk. *idiorrhythmia*.
[4] Lit. 'the one who arranges the contests or races, and sets the handicaps', hence, 'the president', 'umpire' or 'judge of the races'.

who has stumbled on distrust has already fallen; for all that does not spring from faith, is sin.[1] The moment any thought of judging or condemning your superior occurs to you, leap away from it as from fornication. Whatever you do, give that snake no licence, no place, no entry, no power; but say to that serpent: 'Listen, deceiver, I have no authority to judge of my superior, but he has been appointed to sit in judgment on me. It is not I who am to be his judge, but he is deputed to be mine.'

8. The Fathers have laid down that psalmody is a weapon, and prayer is a wall, and honest tears are a bath; but blessed obedience in their judgment is confession of faith, without which no one subject to passions will see the Lord.[2]

9. He who submits himself, passes sentence on himself. If his obedience for the Lord's sake is perfect, even if it does not seem perfect, he will escape judgment. But if he does his own will in some things, then although he considers himself obedient, he lays the burden on his own shoulders. It is good if the superior does not give up reproving him; but if he is silent, then I do not know what to say. Those who submit themselves in the Lord in simplicity run the good race without provoking the bile of the demons against themselves by their inquisitiveness.

10. First of all, let us make our confession to our good judge,[3] and to him alone. But if he orders, then to all. Wounds displayed in public will not grow worse, but will be healed.

About a robber who repented

11. Terrible indeed was the judgment of a good judge and shepherd which I once saw in a monastery. For while I was there, it happened that a robber applied for admission to the monastic life. And that most excellent pastor and physician ordered him to take seven days of complete rest, just to see the kind of life in the place. When the week had passed, the pastor called him and asked him privately: 'Would you like to live with us?' And when he saw that he agreed to this with all sincerity, he then asked him what evil he had done in the world. And when he saw that he readily confessed everything, he tried him still further, and said: 'I want you to tell this in the presence of all the brethren.' But he really did hate his sin, and, scorning all shame, without the least hesitation he promised to do it. 'And if you like,' he said, 'I will tell it in the middle of the city of Alexandria.'

And so, the shepherd gathered all his sheep in the church, to the number of 230, and during Divine Service (for it was Sunday), after the reading of the Gospel, he introduced this irreproachable convict. He was dragged by several of the brethren, who gave him moderate blows. His hands were tied behind his back, he was dressed in a hair shirt, his head was sprinkled with ashes. All were astonished at the sight. And immediately a woeful cry rang out, for no one knew what was happening. Then, when the robber appeared at the doors of the church,[4] that holy superior who had such love for souls, said to him in a loud voice: 'Stop! You are not worthy to enter here.'

Dumbfounded by the voice of the shepherd coming from the sanctuary (for he thought, as he afterwards assured us with oaths, that he had heard not a human voice, but thunder), he instantly fell on his face, trembling and shaking all over with fear. As he lay on the ground and moistened the floor with his tears, this wonderful physician, using all means for his salvation, and wishing to give to all an example of saving and effectual humility, again exhorted him, in the presence of all, to tell in detail what he had done. And with terror he confessed one after another all his sins, which revolted every ear, not only sins of the flesh, natural and unnatural, with rational beings and with animals, but even

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[1] Romans xiv, 23.

[2] Hebrews xii, 14.

[3] I.e. priest-confessor.

[4] Orthodox churches are divided into the narthex, the catholicon, and the sanctuary. In ancient times the unbaptized were admitted to the narthex but not to the catholicon. The robber was already in the narthex. He was halted not at the outer door but at the doors of the catholicon.

poisoning, murder and many other kinds which it is indecent to hear or commit to writing. And when he had finished his confession, the shepherd at once allowed him to be given the habit and numbered among the brethren.

12. Amazed by the wisdom of that holy man, I asked him when we were alone: 'Why did you make such an extraordinary show?' That true physician replied: 'For two reasons: firstly, in order to deliver the penitent himself from future shame by present shame; and it really did that, Brother John. For he did not rise from the floor until he was granted remission of all his sins. And do not doubt this, for one of the brethren who was there confided to me, saying: "I saw someone terrible holding a pen and writing-tablet, and as the prostrate man told each sin, he crossed it out with a pen." And this is likely, for it says: I said, I will confess against myself my sin to the Lord; and Thou hast forgiven the wickedness of my heart.[1] Secondly, because there are others in the brotherhood who have unconfessed sins, and I want to induce them to confess too, for without this no one will obtain forgiveness.'

13. I saw much else too that was admirable and worth remembering with that ever-memorable pastor and his flock. And a large part of it I shall try to bring to your knowledge also. For I stayed a considerable time with him, following their manner of life, and was greatly astonished to see how those earth-dwellers were imitating the heavenly beings.

14. In this flock they were united by the indissoluble bond of love; and what was still more wonderful, it was free from all familiarity and idle talk. More than anything else, they tried not to wound a brother's conscience in any way. And if anyone ever showed hatred to another, the shepherd put him in the isolation monastery, like a convict. And once when one of the brethren spoke ill of his neighbour to the shepherd, the holy man at once ordered him to be driven out, saying: 'I cannot allow a visible as well as an invisible devil in the monastery.'

15. I saw among these holy fathers things that were truly profitable and admirable. I saw a brotherhood gathered and united in the Lord, with a wonderful active and contemplative life. For they were so occupied with divine thoughts and they exercised themselves so much in good deeds that there was scarcely any need for the superior to remind them of anything, but of their own good will they aroused one another to divine vigilance. For they had certain holy and divine exercises that were defined, studied and fixed. If in the absence of the superior one of them began to use abusive language or criticize people or simply talk idly, some other brother by a secret nod reminded him of this, and quietly put a stop to it. But if, by chance, the brother did not notice, then the one who reminded him would make a prostration and retire. And the incessant and ceaseless topic of their conversation (when it was necessary to say anything) was the remembrance of death and the thought of eternal judgment.

16. I must not omit to tell you about the extraordinary achievement of the baker of that community. Seeing that he had attained to constant recollection[2] and tears during his service, I asked him to tell me how he came to be granted such a grace. And when I pressed him, he replied: 'I have never thought that I was serving men but God. And having judged myself unworthy of all rest,[3] by this visible fire[4] I am unceasingly reminded of the future flame.'

17. Let us hear about another surprising attainment of theirs. For not even in the refectory did they stop mental activity,[5] but according to a certain custom, these blessed men reminded one another of interior prayer by secret signs and gestures. And they did this not only in the refectory, but at every encounter and gathering.

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[1] Psalm xxxi, 5.

[2] Lit. consciousness; here it means God-consciousness.

[3] *Hēsychia*, 'stillness', 'quiet', 'silence', 'peace'; also 'leisure', 'rest' (Latin otium). From this root is derived the technical term 'hesychasm', the science and practice of contemplative prayer, and also 'hesychast', one who practises interior prayer.

[4] 'visible fire': i.e. the bakehouse fire.

[5] 'mental activity': Gk. *noera ergasia*, a common phrase for interior prayer.

18. And if one of them committed a fault, he would receive many requests from the brothers to allow them to take the case to the shepherd and bear the responsibility and the punishment. That is why this great man, on learning that his disciples did this, inflicted lighter punishments, knowing that the one punished was innocent. And he did not even inquire who had actually fallen into the blunder.

19. Could any hint of idle talk and joking exist among them? If one of them began a dispute with his neighbour, then another, passing by, assumed the role of penitent and so dissolved the anger. But if he noticed that the disputants were spiteful or revengeful, he would report the quarrel to the father occupying the second place after the superior, and prepare the ground for their mutual reconciliation before sundown. But if they continued obstinate, they would either be punished by being deprived of food until they were reconciled, or else be expelled from the monastery.

20. And it is not in vain that this laudable rigour is brought to perfection among them, for it bears and shows abundant fruit. And among these holy fathers many become proficient both in active life and spiritual insight, both in discernment and humility. And there was to be seen among them an awful and angelic sight: venerable and white-haired elders of holy beauty running about in obedience like children and taking a great delight in their humiliation. There I have seen men who had spent some fifty years in obedience. And when I asked them to tell me what consolation they had gained from so great a labour, some of them replied that they had attained to deep humility with which they had permanently repelled every assault. Others said that they had obtained complete insensibility and freedom from pain in calumnies and insults.

21. I have seen others of those ever-memorable fathers with their angelic white hair attain to the deepest innocence and to wise simplicity, spontaneous and God-guided. (Just as an evil man is somewhat double, one thing outwardly and another inwardly, so a simple person is not something double, but something of a unity.)[1] Among them there are none who are fatuous and foolish, like old men in the world who are commonly called 'in their dotage'. On the contrary, outwardly they are utterly gentle and kindly, radiant and sincere, and they have nothing hypocritical, affected or false about them either in speech or character (a thing not found in many); and inwardly, in their soul, like innocent babes, they make God Himself and their superior their very breath, and the eye of their mind keeps a bold and strict watch for demons and passions.

22. The whole of my life, dear and reverend father and God- loving community, would be insufficient to describe the heavenly life and virtue of those blessed monks. But yet it is better to adorn our treatise and rouse you to zeal in the love of God by their most laborious struggles than by my own paltry counsels; for beyond all dispute the inferior is adorned by the superior.[2] Only this I ask, that you should not imagine that we are inventing what we write, for such a suspicion would detract from its value. But let us continue again what we were saying before.

About Isidore

23. A certain man called Isidore, of magistrate's rank, from the city of Alexandria, had recently renounced the world in the above-mentioned monastery, and I found him still there. That most holy shepherd, after accepting him, found that he was full of mischief, very cruel, sly, fierce and arrogant. But with human ingenuity that most wise man contrived to outwit the cunning of the devils, and said to Isidore: 'If you have decided to take upon yourself the yoke of Christ, then I want you first of all to learn obedience.' Isidore replied: 'As iron to the smith, so I surrender myself in submission to you, holy father.' The great father, making use of this comparison, at once gave exercise to the iron Isidore, and said: 'I want you, brother by nature, to stand at the gate of the monastery, and to make a prostration to

[1] The words in parenthesis are missing in some versions.

[2] Hebrews vii, 7.

everyone coming in or going out, and to say: "Pray for me, father; I am an epileptic." 'And he obeyed as an angel obeys the Lord.

When he had spent seven years there, he attained to deep humility and compunction. Then the glorious father, after the lawful seven years and the man's incomparable patience, judged him fully worthy to be numbered among the brethren and wanted to profess him and have him ordained. But Isidore through others and through my feeble intervention, implored the shepherd many times to let him finish his course as he was living before, vaguely hinting that his end and call were drawing near. And that was actually the case. For when his director had allowed him to remain as he was, ten days later in his lowliness he passed gloriously to the Lord. And on the seventh day after his own falling asleep, the porter of the monastery was also taken. For the blessed man had said to him: 'If I have found favour in the sight of the Lord, in a short time you also will be inseparably joined to me there.'[1] And that is what happened, in witness of his unashamed obedience and divine humility.

24. When he was still living, I asked this great Isidore what occupation his mind had found during his time at the gate. And the famous ascetic did not hide this from me, wishing to help me: 'In the beginning', he said, 'I judged that I had been sold into slavery for my sins; and so it was with bitterness, with a great effort, and as it were with blood that I made the prostration. But after a year had passed, my heart no longer felt sorrow, and I expected a reward for my obedience from God Himself. But when another year had gone by, I began to be deeply conscious of my unworthiness even to live in the monastery, and see and meet the fathers, and partake of the Divine Mysteries. And I did not dare to look anyone in the face, but bending low with my eyes, and still lower with my thought, I sincerely asked for the prayers of those coming in and going out.'

About Laurence

25. Once as we were sitting together in the refectory, this great superior put his holy mouth to my ear and said: 'Do you want me to show you divine prudence in extreme old age?' And when I begged him to do so, the righteous man called from the second table one named Laurence, who had been about forty-eight years in the community and was second priest in the monastery. He came and made a prostration to the abbot, and took his blessing. But when he stood up, the abbot said nothing whatever to him, but left him standing by the table without eating. Breakfast had only just begun, and so he was standing for a good hour, or even two. I was ashamed to look this toiler in the face, for his hair was quite white and he was eighty years old. And when we got up, the saint sent him to the great Isidore whom we mentioned above to recite to him the beginning of the 39th Psalm.[2]

26. And I, like a most worthless person, did not miss the chance of tempting the old man. And when I asked him what he was thinking of when he was standing by the table, he said: 'I thought of the shepherd as the image of Christ, and I considered that I had not received the command from him at all, but from God. And so I stood praying, Father John, not as before a table of men, but as before the altar of God; and because of my faith and love for the shepherd, no evil thought of him entered my mind, for Love does not resent an injury.[3] But know this, Father, that if anyone surrenders himself to simplicity and voluntary innocence, then he no longer gives the devil either time or place to attack him.'

About a bursar

27. God sent that just saviour of spiritual sheep under God another exactly like himself to be the bursar of the monastery; for he was chaste and temperate as no one else, and meek as very few are. Once the

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[1] I.e. just as they were joined at the gate.

[2] Psalm xxxix begins: 'I waited patiently for the Lord, and He inclined to me and heard my cry.'

[3] 1 Corinthians xiii, 15.

great elder, for the edification of the others, pretended to get angry with him in church, and ordered him to be sent out before the time. Knowing that he was innocent of what the pastor accused him, when we were alone I began to plead the cause of the bursar before the great man. But the wise director said: 'And I too know, Father, that he is not guilty, but just as it would be a pity and wrong to snatch bread from the mouth of a starving child, so too the director of souls does harm both to himself and to the ascetic if he does not give him frequent opportunities to obtain crowns such as the superior considers he merits at every hour by bearing insults, dishonour, contempt or mockery. For three very serious wrongs are done: first, the director himself is deprived of the rewards which he would receive for corrections and punishments; secondly, the director acts unjustly when by virtue of that one person he could have brought profit to others, but does not do so; and thirdly, the most serious harm is that often the very people who seem to be most hard-working and patient, if left for a time without blame or reproach from the superior as people confirmed in virtue, lose the meekness and patience they previously had. For even land that is good and fruitful and fertile, if left without the water of dishonour, can revert to forest and produce the thorns of vanity, cowardice and audacity. Knowing this, that great Apostle sent word to Timothy: 'Keep at it, reprove, rebuke them in season and out of season.'[1]

28. I disputed the matter with that true director, and reminded him of the infirmity of our race, and that the undeserved, or perhaps not undeserved, punishment may make many break away from the flock. Again that temple of wisdom said: 'A soul attached to the shepherd with love and faith for Christ's sake will not leave him even if it were at the price of his blood, and especially if he has received through him the healing of his wounds, for he remembers him who says: Neither angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor any other creature can separate us from the love of Christ.[2] But if the soul is not attached, bound and devoted to the shepherd in this way, then I wonder if such a man is not living in this place in vain, for he is united to the shepherd by a hypocritical and false obedience.' And truly this great man is not deceived, but he has directed, led to perfection and offered to Christ unblemished sacrifices.

About Abbacyrus

29. Let us hear and wonder at the wisdom of God found in earthen vessels. When I was in the same monastery, I was amazed at the faith and patience of the novices, and how they bore rebukes and insults from the superior with invincible fortitude, and some times even expulsion; and endured this not only from the superior but even from those far below him. For my spiritual edification I questioned one of the brothers called Abbacyrus who had lived fifteen years in the monastery. For I saw that almost all greatly maltreated him, and those who served drove him out of the refectory almost every day because the brother was by nature just a little too talkative. And I said to him: 'Brother Abbacyrus, why do I see you being driven out of the refectory every day, and often going to bed without supper?' He replied: 'Believe me, Father, my fathers are testing me to see whether I am really a monk. But they are not doing this in real earnest. And knowing the great man's aim and theirs, I bear all this without getting depressed; and I have done so now for fifteen years. For on my entry into the monastery they themselves told me that those who renounce the world are tested for thirty years. And rightly, Father John, for without trial gold is not purified.'

30. This heroic Abbacyrus lived in the monastery for two years after my coming there, and then passed to the Lord. Just before his death he said to the Fathers: 'I am thankful, thankful to the Lord and to you. For having been tempted by you for my salvation, I have lived for seventeen years without temptations from devils.' The just shepherd duly rewarded him and ordered him, as a confessor, to be buried with the local saints.

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[1] 2 Timothy iv, 2.

[2] Romans viii, 58.

About Macedonius the archdeacon

31. I should be quite unjust to all enthusiasts for perfection if I were to bury in the tomb of silence the achievement and reward of Macedonius, the first of the deacons there. This man, so consecrated to the Lord, just before the feast of the Holy Theophany,[1] actually two days before it, once asked the pastor for permission to go to Alexandria for a certain personal need of his, promising to return from the city as soon as possible for the approaching festival and the preparation for it. But the devil, the hater of good, hindered the archdeacon, and though released by the abbot, he did not return to the monastery for the holy feast at the time appointed by the superior. On his returning a day late, the pastor deposed him from the diaconate and put him in the rank of the lowest novices. But that good deacon of patience and archdeacon of endurance accepted the father's decision as calmly as if another had been punished and not himself. And when he had spent forty days in that state, the wise pastor raised him again to his own rank. But scarcely a day had passed before the archdeacon begged the pastor to leave him in his former discipline and dishonour, saying: 'I committed an unforgivable sin in the city.' But knowing that Macedonius was telling him an untruth and that he sought punishment only for the sake of humility, the Saint yielded to the good wish of the ascetic. Then what a sight there was! An honoured elder with white hair spending his days as a novice and sincerely begging everyone to pray for him. 'For', said he, 'I fell into the fornication of disobedience.' But this great Macedonius in secret told me, lowly though I am, why he voluntarily pursued such a humiliating course of life. 'Never', he assured me, 'have I felt in myself such relief from every conflict and such sweetness of divine light as now. It is the property of angels,' he continued, 'not to fall, and even, as some say, it is quite impossible for them to fall. It is the property of men to fall, and to rise again as often as this may happen. But it is the property of devils, and devils alone, not to rise once they have fallen.'

About a certain other brother

32. A brother who was the bursar of the monastery confided this to me: 'When I was young', he said, 'and was looking after cattle, I once had a very serious spiritual fall. But as it was never my habit to hide a snake in a hole in my heart, I caught it by the tail (and by the tail I mean the end of the business) and at once showed it to the physician. But with a smiling face, he struck me lightly on the jaw, and said to me: "Go, child, and continue your work as before, without being afraid in the least." And accepting this with flaming faith, in the course of a few days I received the assurance of my healing, and continued my way with both joy and fear.'

33. Every kind of creature, as some say, has its differences which distinguish it from others. So, too, in the company of the brothers there were differences both in success and in disposition. When their physician noticed that some liked to display themselves before people of the world who were visiting the monastery, then in the presence of such visitors he subjected them to extreme insults and gave them the most humiliating task, so that they began to beat a hasty retreat, and the arrival of secular visitors proved to be their victory. Then an extraordinary spectacle presented itself: vanity chasing herself away and escaping from people.

About Saint Menas

34. As the Lord did not wish to deprive me of the prayer of a holy father in the same monastery, a week before my departure He took to Himself a wonderful man called Menas who occupied the second place after the superior, and had lived fifty-nine years in the community fulfilling all the various offices. On the third day after the falling asleep of this holy man, when we had performed the customary rites over him, suddenly the whole place where the saint was resting was filled with

[1] I.e. the feast of the Baptism of Christ, corresponding to some extent to the Western Epiphany.

fragrance. Then the great man allowed us to uncover the coffin in which he had been placed, and when this was done we all saw that fragrant myrrh was flowing like two fountains from his precious feet. Then that teacher said to all: 'Look! The sweat of his toils and labours have been offered as myrrh to God and truly accepted.'

The fathers of that place told us of many triumphs of this most saintly Menas, and amongst others the following: 'Once the superior wanted to test his God-given patience. In the evening Menas came to the abbot's cell, and having prostrated before the abbot, asked him as usual to give him instruction. But the abbot left him lying on the ground till the hour of the Office, and only then blessed him; and having rebuked him for being fond of self-display and for being impatient, he ordered him to get up. The holy man knew Menas would bear all this courageously, and therefore he made this scene for the edification of all.' A disciple of Saint Menas confirmed what was told us about his director, and added: 'I was inquisitive to know whether sleep overcame him while he lay prostrate before the abbot. But he assured me that while lying on the ground he had recited by heart the whole psalter.'

35. I must not fail to adorn the crown of this step with this emerald. Once I started a discussion on silence with some of the most experienced elders in the community. With a smile on their faces and in jovial mood they said to me in a friendly way: 'We, Father John, being material, live a material life, preferring to wage war according to the measure of our weakness, and considering it better to struggle with men, who are sometimes fierce and some times penitent, than with demons who are continually raging and up in arms against us!'

36. One of those ever-memorable fathers who had great love for me according to God and was very outspoken, once said to me kindly: 'If, wise man, you have within you the power of him who said, I can do all things in Christ who strengthens me;[1] if the Holy Spirit has descended upon you with the dew of purity, as upon the Holy Virgin; if the power of the Highest has over shadowed you with patience; then like the Man (Christ our God), gird your loins with the towel of obedience; and having risen from the supper of silence, wash the feet of the brethren in a spirit of contrition; or rather, roll yourself under the feet of the community in spiritual self-abasement. At the gate of your heart place strict and unsleeping guards. Control your wandering mind in your distracted body. Amidst the actions and movements of your limbs, practise mental quiet (*hesychia*). And, most paradoxical of all, in the midst of commotion be unmoved in soul. Curb your tongue which rages to leap into arguments. Seventy times seven in the day wrestle with this tyrant. Fix your mind to your soul as to the wood of a cross to be struck like an anvil with blow upon blow of the hammers, to be mocked, abused, ridiculed and wronged, without being in the least crushed or broken, but continuing to be quite calm and immovable. Shed your own will as a garment of shame, and thus stripped of it enter the practice ground. Array yourself in the rarely acquired breastplate of faith, not crushed or wounded by distrust towards your spiritual trainer. Check with the rein of temperance the sense of touch that leaps forward shamelessly. Bridle your eyes, which are ready to waste hour after hour looking at physical grandeur and beauty, by meditation on death. Gag your mind, overbusy with its private concerns, and thoughtlessly prone to criticize and condemn your brother, by the practical means of showing your neighbour all love and sympathy. By this will all men truly know, dearest father, that we are disciples of Christ, if, while living together, we have love one for another.'[2] 'Come, come,' said this good friend, 'come and settle down with us and for living water drink derision at every hour. For David, having tried every pleasure under heaven, last of all said in bewilderment: Behold, what is good, or what is beautiful? Nothing else but that brethren should dwell together in unity.[3] But if we have not yet been granted this good, that is, such patience and obedience, then it is best for us, having at least discovered our weakness, to live apart far from the athletic lists, and bless the combatants and pray they may be granted patience.' I was won over to the good arguments of this most excellent father and teacher, who

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[1] Philippians iv, 13.

[2] St. John Xlii, 35.

[3] Psalm cxxxii, x.

disputed with me in an evangelical and prophetic manner, or rather as a friend; and without hesitation I agreed to give the honours to blessed obedience.

37. And now, when I have noted yet another profitable virtue of these blessed fathers, which comes as it were from paradise, I shall then come back to my own unlovely and worthless bunch of thistles.[1] The pastor noticed that some repeatedly carried on conversation when we were standing in prayer. Such people he stood for a whole week by the church, and ordered them to make a prostration to everyone going in and out; and what was still more surprising, he did this even with the clergy, in fact, with the priests.

38. Noticing that one of the brothers stood during the psalm singing with more heartfelt feeling than many of the others, and that his movements and the changes of his face made it look as though he was talking to someone, especially at the beginning of the hymns, I asked him to explain what this habit of the blessed man meant. And knowing that it was for my benefit not to hide it, he told me: 'I have the habit, Father John, at the very beginning, of collecting my thoughts, my mind and my soul, and summoning them, I cry to them: O come, let us worship and fall down before Christ, our King and God.'[2]

39. Having earnestly observed the activities of the brother in charge of the refectory, I saw that he always had in his belt a small book, and I learnt that he wrote his thoughts in it each day and showed them all to the shepherd. And I saw that not only he, but also very many of the brethren there did the same. And this, as I heard, was by order of that great shepherd.

40. Once one of the brothers was expelled by him for slandering his neighbour to him and calling him a windbag and gossip. The expelled man did not leave the gates of the monastery for a whole week, begging to be granted entry and forgiveness. When that lover of souls learnt of this, and heard that this brother had had nothing to eat for six days, he told him: 'If you have a resolute desire to live in the monastery, I will degrade you to the rank of a penitent.' And when the penitent gladly accepted this, the pastor ordered him to be taken to the separate monastery for those who were mourning over their falls. And that was done. But since we have mentioned that monastery, I shall now speak about it briefly.

41. At a distance of a mile from the great monastery was a place called the prison, deprived of every comfort. There neither smoke, nor wine, nor oil in the food, nor anything else could ever be seen but only bread and light vegetables. Here the pastor shut up, without permission to go out, those who fell into sin after entering the brotherhood; and not all together, but each in a separate and special cell, or at most in pairs. And he kept them there until the Lord gave him assurance of the amendment of each one. Over them he placed the sub-prior, a great man called Isaac, who required of those entrusted to him almost unceasing prayer. And to prevent despondency they had a large quantity of palm leaves.[3] Such is the life, such is the rule, such is the conduct of those who truly seek the face of the God of Jacob![4]

42. To admire the labours of the saints is good; to emulate them wins salvation; but to wish suddenly to imitate their life in every point is unreasonable and impossible.

43. When we are bitten by remorse, let us remember our sins until the Lord, seeing the force of our efforts (the efforts of those who do violence to themselves for His sake), wipes out our sins and transforms the sorrow that is gnawing our heart into joy. For it is said: According to the multitude of my sorrows in my heart, thy consolations have gladdened my soul.[5] At the right time let us not forget

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[1] Gk. *akanthologēmata*; this might be rendered 'thistle gatherings' or 'bunch of weeds'.

[2] Psalm xciv, 6 and Church Service Books.

[3] Palm leaves were used for making baskets.

[4] Psalm xxiii, 6.

[5] Psalm xciii, 19.

him who said to the Lord: O how many troubles and evils hast Thou shown me! Yet Thou didst turn and revive me; and from the depths of the earth after I had fallen, again Thou broughtest me up.[1]

44. Blessed is he who, though maligned and disparaged every day, masters himself for the Lord's sake. He will join the chorus of martyrs and boldly converse with the angels. Blessed is the monk who regards himself as hourly deserving every dishonour and disparagement. Blessed is he who mortifies his will to the end, and leaves the care of himself to his director in the Lord; for he will be placed at the right hand of the Crucified. He who will not accept a reproof, just or unjust, renounces his own salvation. But he who accepts it with an effort, or even without an effort, will soon receive the remission of his sins.

45. Show God in spirit your faith in your spiritual father and your sincere love for him. And God in unknown ways will suggest to him that he may be attached to you and kindly disposed towards you, just as you are well disposed towards him.

46. He who exposes every snake shows that he has real faith; but he who hides them will wander in trackless wastes.

47. A man will know his brotherly love and his genuine charity when he sees that he mourns for his brother's sins, and rejoices at his progress and graces.

48. He whose will and desire in conversation is to establish his own opinion, even though what he says is true, should recognize that he is sick with the devil's disease. And if he behaves like this only in conversation with his equals, then perhaps the rebuke of his superiors may heal him. But if he acts in this way even with those who are greater and wiser than he, then his malady is humanly incurable.

49. He who is not submissive in speech, clearly will not be so in act either. For he who is unfaithful in little is also unfaithful in much, and is intractable. He labours in vain, and he will get nothing from holy obedience but his own doom.

50. If anyone has his conscience in the utmost purity in the matter of obedience to his spiritual father, then he daily awaits death as if it were sleep, or rather life, and is not dismayed, knowing for certain that at the time of his departure, not he, but his director, will be called to account.

51. If anyone receives voluntarily some task from his father, and in doing it suffers a stumble, he should not ascribe the blame to the giver but to the receiver of the weapon. For he took the weapon for battle against the enemy, but has turned it against his own heart. But if he forced himself for the Lord's sake to accept the task, though he previously explained his weakness to him who gave it, let him take courage; for though he has fallen, he is not dead.

52. I have forgotten to set before you, my friends, this sweet bread of virtue. I saw there men obedient in the Lord who subjected themselves to insults and dishonour for God's sake, so that, having prepared themselves in this way, they might get used to not quailing before insults coming from others.

53. By resolving to make one's confession, the soul is thereby held from sinning as by a bridle. For what we do not confess, that we do fearlessly as though in the dark.

54. When in the absence of the superior we imagine his face and think that he is always standing by us, and avoid every meeting, or word, or food, or sleep, or anything else that we think he would not like, then we have really learnt true obedience. Base-born children regard the absence of their teacher as a joy, but legitimate ones think it a loss.

55. I once asked one of the most experienced fathers and pressed him to tell me how humility is obtained by obedience. He said: 'The obedient man who has discernment, even if he raises the dead and receives the gift of tears and freedom from conflict, will still think that it is the prayer of his spiritual father that has done it, and he remains foreign and alien to vain presumption. For how could

[1] Psalm lxx, 20.

he possibly pride himself on what is done, as he himself admits, by the help of his father, and not by his own effort?'

56. But the practice of the above virtues is unknown to the solitary.[1] For his rigours have brought him conceit and suggest to him that his achievements are due to his own effort.

57. He who lives in obedience has eluded two snares and remains in future an obedient servant of Christ.

The first snare

58. The devil battles with those in obedience, sometimes to defile them with bodily pollutions and make them hard-hearted, and sometimes to provoke more than usual restlessness. At other times he makes them dry and barren, sluggish in prayer, drowsy and confused by spiritual darkness, in order to tear them away from their struggle by making them think they have gained nothing by their obedience but are only backsliding. For he does not allow them time to reflect that often the providential withdrawal of our imagined goods or blessings leads us to the deepest humility.

59. However, some have often repelled that deceiver by patience; but while he is still speaking, another angel[2] stands by us and after a little while tries to hoodwink us in another way.

The second snare

I have seen some living in obedience who, through their father's direction, became filled with compunction, meek, temperate, zealous, free from inner conflicts, and fervent. But demons came to them and sowed in them the thought that they now had the qualifications for the solitary life,[3] and that in solitude they would attain to freedom from passion[4] as the final prize. Thus deceived, they left the harbour and put out to sea, but when a storm came down upon them they were pitifully exposed to danger from this foul and bitter ocean through being unprovided with pilots.

60. This sea is bound to be stirred up and roused and enraged, so as to cast out of it again on to the dry land the wood, and hay, and all the corruption that was brought down into it by the rivers of the passions. Let us watch nature and we shall find that after a storm at sea there comes a deep calm.

61. He who is sometimes obedient to his father and sometimes disobedient is like a person who sometimes puts lotion in his eyes and sometimes quicklime. For it is said, When one builds and an other pulls down, what profit have they had but the labour ?[5]

62. Do not be deceived, son and obedient servant of the Lord, by the spirit of conceit, so that you confess your own sins to your master as if they were another person's. You cannot escape shame except by shame. It is often the habit of the demons to persuade us either not to confess, or to do so as if we were confessing another person's sins, or to lay the blame for our sin on others. Lay bare, lay bare your wound to the physician and, without being ashamed, say: 'It is my wound, Father, it is my plague, caused by my own negligence, and not by anything else. No one is to blame for this, no man, no spirit, no body, nothing but my own carelessness.'

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[1] Gk. *hēsychastēs*.

[2] I.e. devil.

[3] 'Holy quiet.' Gk. *hēsychia*.

[4] Or, 'dispassion'.

[5] Ecciesiasticus xxxiv, 23.

63. At confession be like a condemned criminal in disposition and in outward appearance and in thought. Cast your eyes to the earth, and, if possible, sprinkle the feet of your judge and physician, as the feet of Christ, with your tears.

64. If everything depends on habit, and follows upon it, then still more do the virtues depend on habit, for they have God as their great collaborator.

65. You will not labour many years, son, in search of blessed inner peace, if in the beginning you surrender yourself with all your soul to indignities.

66. Do not think that it is improper to make your confession to your helper, as to God, in a prostrate position. I have seen condemned criminals, by their sorry appearance and violent confession and entreaty, soften the severity of the judge and change his anger into mercy. That is why even John the Baptist required confession before baptism of those who came to him, not because he himself needed to know their sins, but so as to effect their salvation.

67. Let us not be surprised if even after confession we are still attacked; for it is better to struggle with thoughts than with conceit.

68. Do not be over-eager and do not be carried away when you hear tales of the silent[1] and hermit fathers. For you are marching in the army of the First Martyr. And if you fall, do not leave the practice-ground, for then especially more than ever we need a physician. He who strikes his foot against a stone when he has help, would certainly not only have stumbled unaided but would have died.

69. When we are brought down, then the demons quickly attack us, and seizing on a reasonable, or rather unreasonable pretext, they advise us to adopt the life of a solitary. The aim of our enemies is to inflict wounds upon us as we sin.

70. When a physician protests his incompetence, then you have to go to another, because few are healed without a physician. And who would think of contradicting us when we say that every ship that encounters shipwreck with a skilled pilot would be utterly lost without a pilot?

71. From obedience comes humility, and from humility comes dispassion; for the Lord remembered us in our humility and redeemed us from our enemies.[2] Therefore nothing prevents us from saying that from obedience comes dispassion, through which the goal of humility is attained. For humility is the beginning of dispassion, as Moses is the beginning of the Law; and the daughter perfects the mother, as Mary perfects the Synagogue.

72. Those sick souls who try out a physician and receive help from him, and then abandon him out of preference for another before they are completely healed, deserve every punishment from God. Do not run from the hand of him who has brought you to the Lord, for you will never in your life esteem anyone like him.

73. It is dangerous for an inexperienced soldier to leave his regiment and engage in single combat. And it is not without peril for a monk to attempt the solitary life before he has had much experience and practice in the struggle with the animal passions. The one subjects his body to danger, the other risks his soul. Two are better than one, says Scripture.[3] That is to say, 'It is better for a son to be with his father, and to struggle with his attachments with the help of the divine power of the Holy Spirit.' He who deprives a blind man of his leader, a flock of its shepherd, a lost man of his guide, a child of its father, a patient of his doctor, a ship of its pilot, imperils all. And he who attempts unaided to struggle with the spirits gets killed by them.

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[1] Or, 'hesychast'.

[2] Psalm cxxxv, 23—4.

[3] Ecciesiastes iv, 9.

74. Let those entering a hospital for the first time indicate their pains, and let those entering upon obedience show their humility. For the former, the first sign of their health is the relief of their pains, and for the latter a growing self-condemnation; and there is no other sign so unerring.

75. Let your conscience be the mirror of your obedience, and it is enough.

76. Those living in silence subject to a father, have only demons working against them. But those living in a community struggle with demons and human beings. The former, being always under the eyes of the master, keep his commands more strictly; but the latter, on account of his absence, break them to some extent. However, those who are careful and industrious more than make up for this failing by enduring collisions and knocks, and win double crowns.

77. Let us keep guard over ourselves with all care. For when a harbour is full of ships it is easy for them to get crushed by each other, especially if they are secretly riddled with bad temper as by some worm.

78. Let us practise extreme silence and ignorance in the presence of the superior. For a silent man is a son of wisdom, always acquiring much knowledge.

79. I have seen a religious who used to snatch the words from his superior's lips, but I despaired of his obedience when I saw it led to pride and not to humility.

80. Let us keep wide awake with all vigilance, take care with all carefulness, watch with all watchfulness as to when and how service should be preferred to prayer. For you cannot do all things at all times.

81. Attend to yourself in the presence of your brethren, and never try to appear more correct than they are in any circumstance whatever. For if you do, you will have wrought a double ill: you will sting them by your false and hypocritical zeal and you will give yourself a motive for presumption.

82. Be zealous within your soul, without showing it in the least outwardly, either by visible sign or by word or by a hint. And you will only do this when you stop looking down on your neighbour. But if you are still inclined to do this, become like your brethren so that you do not differ from them simply in being conceited.

83. I saw an inexperienced disciple who in the presence of certain people boasted of the achievements of his teacher, thinking to win glory for himself from another's harvest, but he only earned for himself dishonour, for everybody asked him: 'But how could a good tree grow such a barren branch?'

84. It is not when we courageously endure the derision of our father that we are judged patient, but when we endure it from all manner of men. For we bear with our father both out of respect and as a duty to him.

85. Eagerly drink scorn and insult as the water of life from everyone who wants to give you the drink that cleanses from lust. Then a deep purity will dawn in your soul and the divine light will not grow dim in your heart.

86. If anyone sees that the brotherhood is appeased by his efforts he should not boast of it in his heart, because thieves are around. Always remember Him who said: When you have done all that is commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants; we have only done what we were bound to do.[1] The judgment on our labours we shall know at the time of our death.

87. A monastery is an earthly heaven. Therefore let us tune our heart to be like angels serving the Lord. Sometimes those who live in this heaven have hearts of stone. But sometimes again, through compunction, they attain to consolation, in such a way as to avoid conceit or presumption, and they lighten their labours with tears.

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[1] St. Luke xvii, 10.

88. A little fire softens a large piece of wax. So, too, a small in dignity often softens, sweetens and wipes away suddenly all the fierceness, uncouthness, insensibility and hardness of our heart.

89. I once saw two sitting in hiding and watching the labours and listening to the groans of the ascetics. But one was doing this in order to emulate them, the other in order, when the chance came, openly to mock and to impede God's labourer in his good work.

90. Do not be so unreasonably silent as to annoy and embitter others. And do not be slow in your gait and actions when ordered to hasten. Otherwise, you will be worse than the possessed and the rebellious. Often I have seen, as Job says,[1] souls suffering from slowness of character, but sometimes from eagerness. And I was amazed at the diversity of evil.

91. He who is not alone but is with others cannot derive so much profit from psalmody as from prayer; for the confusion of voices renders the psalms indistinct.

92. Constantly wrestle with your thought, and whenever it wanders call it back to you. God does not require from those still under obedience prayer completely free of distractions. Do not despond when your thoughts are filched, but remain calm, and unceasingly recall your mind. Unbroken recollection is proper only to an angel.

93. He who has secretly vowed not to retire from the struggle till his last breath and to endure a thousand deaths of body and soul, will not easily fall into any of these defects. For inconstancy of heart and infidelity to one's place always cause stumblings and disasters. Those who easily go from place to place are complete failures, for nothing causes fruitlessness so much as impatience.

94. If you come to an unknown physician and hospital, behave as though you were passing by, and secretly test the life and spiritual experience of all those living there. And when you begin to feel benefit from the doctors and nurses and get relief from your sicknesses, and especially with regard to your special disease, namely, spiritual pride, then go to them and buy it with the gold of humility, and write the contract on the parchment of obedience with the letters of service and with the angels as witnesses. And tear up and destroy in their presence the parchment of your own will. By going from place to place you get into the way of wasting the price with which Christ bought you. Let the monastery be your tomb before the tomb. For no one will come out of the grave until the general resurrection. And if some religious have left their tomb, see! They are dead. Let us implore the Lord that this may not happen to us.

95. When the senses find the orders heavy, the more lazy decide that they would prefer to devote themselves to prayer. But when they find they are ordered to do something easy they run from prayer as from fire.

96. Some undertake a particular duty, but for a brother's peace of mind, at his request they leave it; and some leave their work through laziness; and some do not leave it out of vainglory; and some do not leave it out of zeal.

97. If you have bound yourself by obligations and notice that your soul's eye is making no progress, do not get leave to quit. The genuine are genuine everywhere, and the reverse is equally true. In the world slander has caused many separations; but in communities greed produces all the falls and rejections. If you rule over your mistress (i.e. your stomach), every place of residence will give you dispassion; but if she rules over you, then outside the tomb you will be in danger everywhere.

98. The Lord who makes wise the blind[2] opens the eyes of the obedient to the virtues of their guide, and He blinds them to his defects. But the hater of good does the opposite.

99. Let us find in what is called quicksilver an image of perfect obedience. For with whatever material we roll it, it runs to the lowest place, and will mix with no defilement.

[1] Cf. Job xiii, I.
[2] Psalm cxlv, 8.

100. Let the zealous be particularly attentive to themselves, lest by condemning the careless they themselves incur worse condemnation. And I think the reason why Lot was justified was because, though living among such people, he never seems to have condemned them.

101. At all times, but most of all during the singing in church, let us keep quiet and undistracted. For by distractions the demons aim to bring our prayer to nothing.

102. A servant of the Lord[1] is he who in body stands before men, but in mind knocks at heaven with prayer.

103. Insults, humiliations and similar things are like the bitterness of wormwood to the soul of a novice; while praises, honours and approbation are like honey and give birth to all manner of sweetness in pleasure-lovers. But let us look at the nature of each: wormwood purifies all interior filth, while honey increases gall.

104. Let us trust with firm confidence those who have taken upon themselves the care of us in the Lord, even though they order something apparently contrary and opposed to our salvation. For it is then that our faith in them is tested as in a furnace of humiliation. For it is a sign of the truest faith if we obey our superiors without any hesitation, even when we see the opposite of what we had hoped for happening.

105. From obedience comes humility, as we have already said earlier. From humility comes discernment as the great Cassian has said with beautiful and sublime philosophy in his chapter on discernment.[2] From discernment comes insight, and from insight comes foresight. And who would not follow this fair way of obedience, seeing such blessings in store for him? It was of this great virtue of obedience that the good Psalmist said: Thou hast in Thy goodness prepared for the poor[3] obedient soul, O God, Thy presence in his heart.

106. Throughout your life remember that great athlete who for eighteen whole years never heard with his outward ears his superior say the words, 'May you be saved,' but inwardly heard daily from the Lord, not merely, 'May you be saved' (which is an uncertain wish), but 'You are saved' (which is definite and sure).

107. Some living in obedience, on noticing the condescension and indulgence of the superior, ask his permission to follow their own desires. But let them know that when they obtain this they completely deprive themselves of the confessor's crown. For obedience is entirely foreign to hypocrisy and one's own will.

108. There was the man who received an order, but on seeing the intention of the person who gave it, namely that the fulfilment of the order would not give him pleasure, asked to be excused. And another saw this, but unhesitatingly obeyed. The question is: which of them acted more piously?

109. It is impossible that the devil should act contrary to his own will. Let those living an easy-going life, whether persevering in one solitary place or in a community, convince you of this. Let the temptation to retire from our place be a proof for us that our life there is pleasing to God. For being warred against is a sign that we are making war.

About Saint Acacius

110. I will not be silent about something which it is not right to leave in silence lest I should inhumanly keep to myself what ought to be made known. The famous John the Sabbaite told me things worth hearing. And that he was detached and above all falsehood, and free from words and deeds of

[1] Lit. 'a deacon' or 'minister'.

[2] . John Cassian, Conference 2.

[3] Psalm lxvii, 10.

evil, you know from your own experience, holy father. This man told me: 'In my monastery in Asia (for that is where the good man came from) there was a certain elder who was extremely careless and undisciplined. I say this without passing judgment on him, but simply to state the truth. He obtained, I do not know how, a disciple, a youth called Acacius, simple-hearted but prudent in thought. And he endured so much from this elder that to many people it will perhaps seem incredible. For the elder tormented him daily not only with insults and indignities, but even with blows. But his patience was not mere senseless endurance. And so, seeing him daily in wretched plight like the lowest slave, I would ask him when I met him: "What is the matter, Brother Acacius, how are you today?" And he would at once show me a black eye, or a scarred neck or head. But knowing that he was a worker, I would say to him: "Well done, well done; endure and it will be for your good." Having done nine years with this pitiless elder, he departed to the Lord. Five days after his burial in the cemetery of the fathers, Acacius's master went to a certain elder living there and said to him: "Father, Brother Acacius is dead." As soon as the elder heard this he said: "Believe me, elder, I do not believe it." The other replied: "Come and see." The elder at once rose and went to the cemetery with the master of the blessed ascetic. And he called as to a living person to him who was truly alive in his falling asleep, and said: "Are you dead, Brother Acacius?" And the good doer of obedience, showing his obedience even after his death, replied to the great elder: "How is it possible, Father, for a man who is a doer of obedience to die ?" Then the elder who had been Acacius's master became terrified and fell on his face in tears. Afterwards he asked the abbot of the Laura for a cell near the tomb, and lived in it devoutly, always saying to the fathers: "I have committed murder." And it seemed to me, Father John, that the one who spoke to the dead man was the great John himself. For that blessed soul told me another story as if it were about someone else, when it was really about himself, as I was afterwards able to learn for certain.'

About John the Sabbaite, or Antiochus

111. 'There was another,' said John, 'in the same monastery in Asia who became a disciple of a certain meek, gentle and quiet monk. And seeing that the elder honoured and cared for him, he rightly judged that this would be fatal for many men, and he begged the elder to send him away. (As the elder had another disciple, this would not cause him much inconvenience.) And so he went away, and with a letter from his master he settled in a cenobitic monastery in Pontus. On the first night that he entered this monastery he saw in a dream his account being made out by someone, and after settling that awful account he was left a debtor to the sum of a hundred pounds of gold. When he woke up he began to reflect on what he had seen in his dream and said: "Poor Antiochus" (for this was his name), "you certainly fall far short of your debt!"' 'And when,' he continued, 'I had lived in this monastery for three years in unquestioning obedience, and was regarded by all with contempt and was insulted as the stranger (for there was no other strange monk there), then again I saw in a dream someone giving me a credit-note for the payment of ten pounds of my debt. And so when I woke up and had thought about my dream, I said: "Still only ten! But when shall I pay the rest?" After that I said to myself: "Poor Antiochus! Still more toil and dishonour for you." From that time forward I began to pretend to be a blockhead, yet without in any way neglecting the service of all. But when the merciless fathers saw that I willingly served in that same condition, they gave me all the heavy work of the monastery. In such a way of life I spent thirteen years, when in a dream I saw those who had appeared to me before, and they gave me a receipt in complete settlement of my debt. So when the members of the monastery imposed upon me in any way, I remembered my debt and endured it courageously.' So you see, Father John, that wise John told me this as if it were about another person. And that was why he changed his name to Antiochus. But in actual fact it was he himself who so courageously destroyed the handwriting[1] by his patience and obedience.

[1] Cf. Colossians ii, 24.

112. Let us hear what a gift of discernment this holy man obtained by his utter obedience. When he was residing in the monastery of St. Sabba three young monks came to him wanting to become his disciples. He gladly received them and at once gave them kindly hospitality, wanting to refresh them after the labour of their journey. When three days had passed, the elder said to them: 'By nature, brothers, I am prone to fornication, and I cannot accept any of you.' But they were not scandalized, for they knew the good work of the elder. Yet however much they asked him, they were quite unable to persuade him. Then they threw themselves at his feet and implored him at least to give them a rule—how and where they ought to live. So he yielded to their entreaties, and knowing that they would receive it with humility and obedience, the elder said to one: 'The Lord wants you, child, to live in a place of solitude in subjection to a father.' And to the second he said: 'Go and sell your will and give it to God, and take up your cross and persevere in a community and monastery of brothers, and you will certainly have treasure in heaven.' Then to the third he said: 'Take in with your very breath the word of Him who said: "He who endures to the end will be saved."[1] Go, and if possible choose for your trainer in the Lord the most strict and exacting person and with daily perseverance drink abuse and scorn as milk and honey.' Then the brother said to the great John: 'But, Father, what if the trainer lives a lax life?' The elder replied: 'Even if you see him committing fornication, do not leave him, but say to yourself: "Friend, why are you here ?"[2] Then you will see all pride vanish from you, and lust wither.'

113. Let all of us who wish to fear the Lord struggle with our whole might, so that in the school of virtue we do not acquire for ourselves malice and vice, cunning and craftiness, curiosity and anger. For it does happen, and no wonder! As long as a man is a private individual, or a seaman, or a tiller of the soil, the King's enemies do not war so much against him. But when they see him taking the King's colours,[3] and the shield, and the dagger, and the sword, and the bow, and clad in soldier's garb, then they gnash at him with their teeth, and do all in their power to destroy him. And so, let us not slumber.

114. I have seen innocent and most beautiful children come to school for the sake of wisdom, education and profit, but through contact with the other pupils they learn there nothing but cunning and vice. The intelligent will understand this.

115. It is impossible for those who learn a craft whole-heartedly not to make daily advance in it. But some know their progress, while others by divine providence are ignorant of it. A good banker never fails in the evening to reckon the day's profit or loss. But he cannot know this clearly unless he enters it every hour in his notebook. For the hourly account brings to light the daily account.

116. When a foolish person is accused or shouted at he is wounded by it and tries to contradict, or at once makes an apology to his accuser, not out of humility but in order to stop the accusations. But when you are being ridiculed, be silent, and receive with patience these spiritual cauterizations, or rather, purifying flames. And when the doctor has finished, then ask his forgiveness. For while he is angry perhaps he will not accept your apology.

117. While struggling against all the passions, let us who are in communities struggle every hour, especially against these two: greed of stomach and irritability. For in a community there is plenty of food for these passions.

118. The devil suggests to those living in obedience the desire for impossible virtues. Similarly, to those living in solitude he proposes unsuitable ideas. Scan the mind of inexperienced novices and there you will find distracted thought: a desire for quiet, for the strictest fast, for uninterrupted prayer, for absolute freedom from vanity, for unbroken remembrance of death, for continual compunction, for perfect freedom from anger, for deep silence, for surpassing purity. And if by divine providence they are without these to start with, they rush in vain to another life and are deceived. For the enemy urges

[1] St. Matthew x, 22.

[2] St. Matthew xxvi, 50.

[3] Lit. 'seal'. In the Orthodox service of Confirmation each anointing is accompanied by the words 'The seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit'. Cf. 2, Cor. i, 22.

them to seek these perfections prematurely, so that they may not persevere and attain them in due course. But to those living in solitude the deceiver extols hospitality, service, brotherly love, community life, visiting the sick. The devil's aim is to make the latter as impatient as the former.

119. Only a few (and it is true what I say) can live in solitude;[1] in fact, only those who have obtained divine consolation for encouragement in their labours and divine co-operation in their struggles.

120. Let us judge the nature of our passions and of our obedience, and choose our spiritual father accordingly. If you are prone to lust, then do not select as your trainer a wonderworker who is ready for everyone with a welcome and a meal, but rather an ascetic who will hear of no consolation in food. If you are haughty, then let him be stern and unyielding, and not meek and kindly. Let us not seek those who have the gift of foreknowledge and foresight, but rather those who are unquestionably humble and whose character and place of residence correspond to our maladies. And after the example of the above-mentioned righteous Abbacyrus, adopt this good habit so conducive to obedience, of always thinking that the Superior is trying you, and you will certainly never go wide of the mark. If your director constantly rebukes you and you thereby obtain great faith and love for him, then know that the Holy Spirit has invisibly made His abode in your soul and the power of the Highest has overshadowed you.

121. But do not boast or rejoice when you bear insults and indignities courageously, but rather mourn that you have done something meriting your bad treatment and incensed the soul of your director against you. Do not be surprised at what I am going to say (for I have Moses to support me). It is better to sin against God than against our father; for when we anger God, our director can reconcile us; but when he is incensed against us, there is no one to propitiate him for us. But it seems to me that both cases amount to the same thing.

122. Let us look carefully and make our decision and keep alert as to when we ought to endure thankfully and silently accusations made to our pastor, and when we ought to reassure him. It seems to me that in all cases when indignity is offered to us we should be silent; for it is our moment of profit. But in those cases where another person is involved, we should put up a defence so as to maintain the link of love and peace unbroken.

123. Those who have jumped out of obedience will tell you of its value; for it was only then that they fully realized the heaven in which they had been living.

124. He who is running towards dispassion and God regards as a great loss any day in which he is not reviled. Just as trees swayed by the winds drive their roots deeply into the earth, so those who live in obedience get strong and unshakable souls.

125. He who has come to know his weakness by living in solitude, and has then changed his place and sold himself to obedience, has without trouble recovered his sight and seen Christ.

126. Keep at it, brother athletes, and I will say it again, keep running, as you hear Wisdom crying of you: As gold in the furnace, or rather, in a community, the Lord has tried them, and as a whole burnt offering has He received them into His bosom.[2] To Him belongs the glory and eternal dominion, with the eternal Father and with the Holy and adorable Spirit! Amen.

This step is equal in number to the Evangelists. Athlete, keep running fearlessly![3]

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[1] Lit. 'silence'.

[2] Wisdom iii, 6.

[3] In some manuscripts there is dislocation here. The first sentence of Step 5 is sometimes placed here.

Step 5

On painstaking and true repentance which constitute the life of the holy convicts; and about the prison.

Once John outran Peter;[1] and now obedience precedes repentance. For the one who came first is a symbol of obedience, and the other of repentance.

1. Repentance is the renewal of baptism. Repentance is a contract with God for a second life. A penitent is a buyer[2] of humility. Repentance is constant distrust of bodily comfort. Repentance is self-condemning reflection, and carefree self-care. Repentance is the daughter of hope and the renunciation of despair. A penitent is an undisgraced convict. Repentance is reconciliation with the Lord by the practice of good deeds contrary to the sins. Repentance is purification of conscience. Repentance is the voluntary endurance of all afflictions. A penitent is the inflicter of his own punishments. Repentance is a mighty persecution of the stomach, and a striking of the soul into vigorous awareness.

2. Gather together and come near, all you who have angered God; come and listen to what I expound to you; assemble and see what He has revealed to my soul for your edification. Let us give first place and first honour to the story of the dishonoured yet honoured workers. Let all of us who have suffered an unexpected and inglorious fall listen, watch and act. Rise and be seated, you who through your falls are lying prostrate. Attend, my brothers, attend to my word. Incline your ears, you who wish to be reconciled afresh with God by a true conversion.

3. Weak as I am, I heard that there was a certain powerful and strange way of life and humility for those living in a separate monastic establishment called 'The Prison' which was under the authority of the above-mentioned man, that light of lights. So when I was still staying there I asked the good man to allow me to visit it. And the great man, never wishing to grieve a soul in any way, agreed to my request.

4. And so, coming to this abode of penitents and to this true land of mourners, I actually saw (if it is not audacious to say so) what is most cases the eye of a careless person never saw, and what the ear of a slothful and easy-going person never heard, and what never entered the heart of a timid person[3]—that is, I saw such deeds and words as can incline God to mercy; such activities and postures as speedily attract His love for men.

5. I saw some of those guilty yet guiltless men standing in the open air, all night till morning and never moving their feet, by force of nature pitifully dazed by sleep; yet they allowed themselves no rest, but reproached themselves, and drove away sleep with dishonours and insults.

6. Others lifted up their eyes to heaven, and with wailings and outcries, implored help from there.

7. Others stood in prayer with their hands tied behind their backs like criminals, their faces, darkened by sorrow, bent to the earth. They regarded themselves as unworthy to look up to heaven. Overwhelmed by the embarrassment of their thoughts and conscience they could not find anything to say or pray about to God, how or with what to begin their prayers. But as if filled with darkness and a blank despair, they offered to God nothing but a speechless soul and a voiceless mind.

8. Others sat on the ground in sackcloth and ashes, hiding their faces between their knees, and striking the earth with their foreheads.

9. Others were continually beating their breasts and recalling their past life and state of soul. Some of them watered the ground with their tears; others, incapable of tears, struck themselves. Some loudly lamented over their souls as over the dead, not having the strength to bear the anguish of their heart.

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[1] St. John XX, 4.
[2] Gk. *agorastēs*, the slave who did the shopping.
[3] I Corinthians ii, 9.

Others groaned in their heart, but stifled all sound of their lamentation. But sometimes they could control themselves no longer, and would suddenly cry out.

10. I saw there some who seemed from their demeanour and their thoughts to be out of their mind. In their great disconsolateness they had become like dumb men in complete darkness, and were insensible to the whole of life. Their minds had already sunk to the very depths of humility, and had burnt up the tears in their eyes with the fire of their despondency.

11. Others sat thinking and looking on the ground, swaying their heads unceasingly, and roaring and moaning like lions from their inmost heart to their teeth. And some were praying in good hope and asking for complete forgiveness. Others out of unspeakable humility condemned themselves as unworthy of forgiveness, and would cry out that it was not within their power to justify themselves before God. Some begged the Lord that they be punished here, and receive mercy in the next world. Others, crushed by the weight of their conscience, would say in all sincerity: 'Spare us from future punishment, even though we are not worthy to be granted the Kingdom. And that will satisfy us.'

12. I saw there humble and contrite souls depressed by the weight of their burden. Their voices and outcries to God would have moved the very stones to compassion. For, casting their gaze to the earth they would say: 'We know, we know that in all justice we deserve every punishment and torment. For how could we make satisfaction for the multitude of our debts even if we were to summon the whole world to weep for us? But this is our only petition, this our prayer, this our supplication, that He may not rebuke us in anger, nor chasten us in His wrath.[1] Punish, but spare! It is sufficient for us if Thou deliverest us from Thy great threat, from the unknown and hidden torments. For we dare not ask for complete forgiveness—how could we? For we have not kept our vow but have defiled it, even Thy past loving kindness and forgiveness.

13. And there, friends, the fulfilment of the words of David could be clearly seen, men enduring hardship and bowed down to the end of their life, going about with a sad countenance all day long, the wounds in their body stinking of rottenness,[2] and they took no notice of them, and they forgot to eat their bread, and they mingled their drink of water with weeping; they ate dust and ashes with their bread, and their bones cleaved to their flesh, and were withered like grass.[3] You could hear from them nothing but the words: 'Woe, woe! Alas, alas! It is just, it is just! Spare us, spare us O Lord.' Some were saying: 'Have mercy, have mercy,' and others still more plaintively: 'Forgive, O Lord; forgive if it is possible.'

14. One could see how the tongues of some of them were parched and hung out of their mouths like a dog's. Some chastised themselves in the scorching sun, others tormented themselves in the cold. Some, having tasted a little water so as not to die of thirst, stopped drinking; others having nibbled a little bread, flung the rest of it away, and said that they were unworthy of being fed like human beings, since they had behaved like beasts.

15. Where could you see anything like laughter, or idle talking, or irritation, or anger? They did not even know that such a thing as anger existed among men, because in themselves grief had finally eradicated anger. Where were disputes among them, or frivolity, or audacious speech, or concern for the body, or a trace of vanity, or hope of comfort, or thought of wine, or eating of fruit, or the cheer of cooked food, or pleasing the palate? For even the hope of all such things had been extinguished in them in this present world. Where amongst them is there any care for earthly things, or condemnation of anyone? Nowhere at all.

16. Such were the unceasing utterances and cries to the Lord which they made. Some, striking themselves hard on the breast, as if standing before the gates of heaven would say to God: 'Open to us,

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[1] Psalm vi, 1.
[2] Psalm xxxvi, 6—7.
[3] Psalm ci, 4—12.

O Judge, open! We have shut ourselves out by our sins. Open to us.' Others would say: 'Only show the light of Thy face, and we shall be saved.'[1] Another again: 'Give light to the humble sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death;[2] and another: 'Let Thy mercies speedily forestall us, O Lord;[3] we have perished, we have despaired; for we have utterly fallen away.' Some would say: 'Will the Lord ever again show the light of His face to us?'[4] Others: 'Will our soul pass through the insupportable debt?'[5] Another said: 'Will the Lord at last be moved to mercy for us?[6] Shall we ever hear Him say to us who are in unending bonds, Come forth,[7] and to us who are in the hell of repentance, Be forgiven? I our cry reached the ears of the Lord?'

17. They all used to sit with the sight of death unceasingly before their eyes and say: 'How will it be with us? What will be our sentence? What kind of end shall we have? Will there be a reprieve for us? Will there be forgiveness for those in darkness, the humble, the convicted? Is our prayer powerful enough to enter before the Lord? Or has it not been deservedly rejected, deemed worthless and shameful? And if it did reach the Lord, how much of the Divine favour would it gain there? What success would it have? What profit would it bring? What power would it have? Coming from foul lips and bodies, it would not have great power. And so, would it reconcile us with the Judge completely or only in part—only to the extent of half our sores? Because they really are tremendous, calling for much sweat and labour. Have our guardian angels drawn nearer to us, or are they still far from us? And until they come nearer to us, all our labours are futile and useless. For our prayer has not the power of access nor the wings of purity to reach the Lord unless our angels approach us and take it and bring it to the Lord.'

18. Some often expressed their doubts to each other and said: 'Are we accomplishing anything brothers? Are we obtaining our requests? Will the Lord accept us again? Will He open to us?' And to this others would reply: 'Who knows, as our brothers the Ninevites said, if God will repent[8] and will deliver us even from great punishment? In any case, let us do our part. And if He opens the door, well and good. And if not, blessed is the Lord God who in His justice has closed the door to us. At least let us persist in knocking at the door till the end of our life. Perhaps He will open to us for our great assiduity and importunity.'[9] Therefore they exhorted one another, saying: 'Let us run, brothers, let us run. For we need to run, and to run hard, because we have fallen behind our holy company. Let us run, and not spare this our foul and wicked flesh, but let us kill it as it has killed us.'

19. And that is what these blessed ones who had been called to account were actually doing. From the number of their prostrations their knees seemed to have become wooden, their eyes dim and sunk deep within their sockets. They had no hair. Their cheeks were bruised and burnt by the scalding of hot tears. Their faces were pale and wasted. They were quite indistinguishable from corpses. Their breasts were livid from blows; and from their frequent beating of the chest, they spat blood. Where was to be found in this place any rest on beds, or clean or starched clothes? They were all torn, dirty and covered with lice. In comparison with them, what are the sufferings of the possessed, or of those weeping for the dead, or of those living in exile, or of those condemned for murder? Their involuntary torture and punishment is really nothing in comparison with this voluntary suffering. I ask you, brothers, not to regard all this as a made-up story.

[1] Psalm lxxix, 4.
[2] St. Luke i, 7-9.
[3] Psalm lxxviii, 8.
[4] Psalm lxvi, 2.
[5] Psalm cxxiii, 5.
[6] Judges ii, 18.
[7] Cf. Isaiah xlix, 9.
[8] Jonah iii, 9.
[9] Cf. St. Luke xi, 8.

20. Often they applied to the great judge, I mean the shepherd, that angel among men, with requests and begged him to put irons and chains on their hands and neck, and to manacle their legs in the stocks, and not to set them free until the tomb received them, or not even the tomb.

21. For I shall certainly not hide this most moving lowliness in these blessed men, and their contrite love for God and repentance. When one of these good inhabitants of the land of repentance was about to go to God and stand before the impartial tribunal, then as soon as he saw that his end was at hand, he would beg the great abbot through the superior set over them with adjurations not to give him human burial, but to fling him, like an irrational animal, into a river bed or to give him up to wild beasts in the fields. And this was often done by that lamp of discernment who would order the dead to be carried out without any psalmody or honour.

22. Most terrible and pitiful was the sight of their last hour. When his fellow-defaulters learnt that one of their number was ready to precede them by finishing his course, they gathered round him while his mind was still active and with thirst, with tears, with love, with a tender look and sad voice, shaking their heads, they would ask the dying man, and would say to him, burning with compassion: 'How are you, brother and fellow criminal? What will you say? What do you hope? What do you expect? Have you accomplished what you sought with such labour or not? Has the door been opened to you, or are you still under judgment? Have you attained your object, or not yet? Have you received any sort of assurance, or is your hope still uncertain? Have you obtained freedom, or is your thought clouded with doubt? Have you felt any enlightenment in your heart or is it still dark and ashamed? Has any inner voice said: Behold thou art made whole,[1] or: Thy sins are forgiven thee, [2]or: Thy faith has saved thee?[3] Or, have you heard a voice like this: "Let the sinners be turned into hell,"[4] and: "Bind him hand and foot, and cast him into the outer darkness,"[5] and again: "Let the wicked man be removed that he may not see the glory of the Lord?"[6] What, quite simply, can you say, brother? Tell us, we beg you, that we too may know in what state we shall be. For your time is already closed, and you will never find another opportunity.' To this some of the dying would reply: 'Blessed is God who has not turned away my prayer, nor His mercy from me.' [7]Others again: 'Blessed is the Lord, who has not given us for a prey to their teeth.'[8] Others said dolefully: 'Will our soul pass through the impassable water[9] of the spirits of the air?'—not having complete confidence, but looking to see what would happen in that rendering of accounts. Others still more dolefully would answer and say: 'Woe to the soul that has not kept its vow intact! In this hour, and in this only, it will know what is prepared for it.'

23. But when I had seen and heard all this among them, I nearly despaired of myself, seeing my own indifference and comparing it with their suffering. For what a place and habitation theirs was! All dark, reeking, filthy and squalid. It was rightly called the prison and house of convicts. The very sight of the place was sufficient to teach all penitence and mourning. But what is hard and intolerable for others becomes easy and acceptable for those who have fallen away from virtue and spiritual riches. For the soul that has lost its former confidence; that has lost hope of dispassion; that has broken the seal of chastity; that has allowed its treasury of gifts to be robbed; that has become a stranger to divine consolation; that has rejected the commandment of the Lord; that has extinguished the beautiful fire of spiritual[10] tears, and is wounded and pierced with sorrow by the remembrance of this will not only undertake the above-mentioned labours with all readiness, but will even devoutly resolve to kill itself

[1] St. John v, 14.
[2] St. Matthew ix, 2.
[3] St. Mark v, 34.
[4] Psalm ix, 18.
[5] St. Matthew xxii, 13.
[6] Isaiah xxvi, 10.
[7] Psalm lxv, 20.
[8] Psalm cxxiii, 6.
[9] Psalm cxxiii, 5
[10] 'Spiritual' is omitted in some manuscripts.

with works of penance, if only there is in it a remnant of a spark of love or fear of the Lord. Such, in truth, were these blessed men. For keeping these things in mind, and considering the height of virtue from which they had fallen, they would say: 'We remember the days of old[1] and that fire of our zeal.' Some would cry to God: 'Where are Thine ancient mercies, O Lord, such as Thou didst reveal to our soul in Thy truth? Remember the reproach and hardships of Thy servants.'[2] And another would say: 'O that I were reinstated as in times past, in the days of the months when God watched over me, when the lamp of His light shone over the head of my heart!'[3]

24. How they would recall their former attainments! And be- wailing them as if they were children that had died, they would say: 'Where is my purity of prayer? Where is its boldness? Where the sweet tears instead of the bitter? Where is the hope of perfect chastity and purification? Where is the expectation of blessed dispassion? Where is my faith in the shepherd? Where is the effect of his prayer in us? All this is lost, and has slipped away as if it had never appeared, and has vanished as if it had never been.'

25. And some prayed to become possessed by devils; others begged the Lord that they might fall into epilepsy;[4] some wished to lose their eyes and present a pitiful spectacle; others, to become paralyzed, only that they might not experience sufferings hereafter. And I, my friends, found so much pleasure in their grief that I forgot myself, and was wholly rapt in mind, and could not contain myself.

26. Having stayed for thirty days in the prison, impatient as I am, I returned to the great monastery and the great shepherd. And when he saw that I was quite changed and had not yet come to myself like a wise man he understood what this change meant and said: 'Well, Father John, did you see the struggles of those who labour at their task?' I replied: 'I saw them, Father, and I was amazed; and I consider those fallen mourners more blessed than those who have not fallen and are not mourning over themselves; because as a result of their fall, they have risen by a sure resurrection.' 'That is certainly so,' he said; and his truthful tongue related to me this story: 'About ten years ago I had a brother here who was extremely zealous and active. And so, when I saw that he was so burning in spirit, I trembled for him lest the devil out of envy should trip his foot against a stone, as he sped along on his course as is apt to happen to those who walk swiftly. And that is just what happened. Late one evening he came to me, showed me the open wound, wanted plaster, asked for cauterization, and was very alarmed. Then, when he saw that the doctor did not wish to make too severe an incision (because he deserved sympathy), he flung himself on the ground, embraced my feet, moistened them with abundant tears, and asked to be shut in the prison which you saw. "It is impossible for me not to go there," he cried. Finally— a rare and most unusual thing among the sick—he urged the doctor to change his kindness to sternness, and with all haste he went to the penitents and became their companion and fellow sufferer. The grief that springs from the love of God pierced his heart as with a sword and on the eighth day, he departed to the Lord, asking that he should not be given burial. But I brought him here, and buried him among the fathers, as he deserved, be cause after his week of slavery, on the eighth day he was released as a free man.[5] And there is one who knows for certain that he did not rise from my foul and wretched feet before he had won God's favour. And no wonder! For having received in his heart the faith of the harlot in the Gospel, he moistened my lowly feet with the same assurance. All things are possible to him who believes, said the Lord.[6] I have seen impure souls raving madly about physical love; but making their experience of carnal love a reason for repentance, they transferred the same love to the Lord; and, over coming all fear, they spurted themselves insatiably into the love of God. That is why

[1] Psalm cxlii, 5.
[2] Psalm lxxxviii, 49—50.
[3] Job xxix, 2—3.
[4] Lit. 'the sacred illness'.
[5] Deuteronomy xv, 12 ff.
[6] St. Mark ix, 23.

the Lord does not say of that chaste harlot: "Because she feared", but: "Because she loved much,"[1] and could easily get rid of love by love.'

27. I am full aware, my good friends, that the struggles I have described will seem to some incredible, to others hard to believe, and will seem to some to breed despair. But to the courageous soul they will serve as a spur, and a shaft of fire; and he will go away carrying zeal in his heart. He who is not up to this will realize his infirmity, and having easily obtained humility by self- reproach, he will run after the former; and I do not know whether he may not even overtake him. But the careless man should leave my stories alone, lest he despair and squander even the little which he has accomplished, and thus correspond to the man of whom it was said: From him who is without alacrity or generosity even what he has will be taken away from him.'[2]

28. It is impossible for us who have fallen into the pit of iniquities ever to be drawn out of it, unless we sink into the abyss of the humility of the penitents.

29. The sorrowful humility of penitents is one thing; the condemnation of the conscience of those who are still living in sin is another; and the blessed wealth of humility which the perfect attain by the action of God is yet another. Let us not be in a hurry to find words to describe this third kind of humility, for our effort will be in vain. But a sign of the second is the perfect bearing of indignity. Previous habit often tyrannizes even over him who deplores it. And no wonder! The account of the judgments of God and our falls is shrouded in darkness, and it is impossible to know which are the falls that come from carelessness, and which from providential abandonment, and which from God's turning away from us. But someone told me that in the case of falls which come to us by Divine Providence we acquire a swift revulsion from them, because He who delivers us does not allow us to be held for long. And let us who fall wrestle above all with the demon of grief. For he stands by us at the time of our prayer, and by reminding us of our former favour with God, he tries to divert our attention from prayer.

30. Do not be surprised that you fall every day; do not give up, but stand your ground courageously. And assuredly the angel who guards you will honour your patience. While a wound is still fresh and warm it is easy to heal, but old, neglected and festering ones are hard to cure, and require for their care much treatment, cutting, plastering and cauterization. Many from long neglect become incurable. But with God all things are possible.[3]

31. The demons say that God is merciful before our fall, but that He is inexorable after the fall.

32. After your fall, do not believe him who says to you of small shortcomings: 'If only you had not done that great fault! But this is nothing in comparison.' Often small gifts appease the great anger of the Judge.

33. He who really keeps account of his actions considers as lost every day in which he does not mourn, whatever good he may have done on it.

34. Let no one who laments expect assurance at his departure. For the unknown is not sure. Spare me, through assurance, that I may revive before I depart hence unassured (of salvation.)[4] Where the Spirit of the Lord is, the bond is loosed. Where there is profound humility, the bond is loosed. But let those who are without these two assurances make no mistake -- they are bound.

35. Those living in the world, and they only, are strangers to these two assurances, and especially the first. But through almsgiving, some so run the race that they know at their departure what their gain has been.

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[1] St. Luke vii, 47.

[2] St. Matthew xxv, 29.

[3] St. Matthew xix, 26.

[4] Psalm xxxviii, 14.

36. He who grieves for himself will not know another's grief or fall or reproach. A dog bitten by a wild beast becomes all the more furious against it and is driven to implacable fury by the pain of the wound.

37. We must carefully consider whether our conscience has ceased to accuse us, not as a result of purity, but because it is immersed in evil. A sign of deliverance from our falls is the continual acknowledgment of our indebtedness.

38. Nothing equals or excels God's mercies. Therefore he who despairs is committing suicide. A sign of true repentance is the acknowledgement that we deserve all the troubles, visible and invisible, that come to us, and even greater ones. Moses, after seeing God in the bush, returned again to Egypt, that is to darkness and to the brick-making of Pharaoh, symbolical of the spiritual pharaoh. But he went back again to the bush, and not only to the bush but also up the mountain. Whoever has known contemplation will never despair of himself. Job became a beggar, but he became twice as rich again.

39. In the case of cowardly and slothful people, the falls that occur after our call are hard to bear; they crush the hope of dispassion and persuade us to regard our rising from the pit of sin as a state of blessedness. Look, look! For certainly we do not return by the way we went astray, but by another shorter route.

40. I saw two men travelling to the Lord in the same way and at the same time. One of them was old and more advanced in labours; but the other was his disciple and soon outran the elder and came first to the sepulchre of humility.[1]

41. Let all of us, and especially the fallen, beware lest we sicken in heart from the disease of the godless Origen.[2] For this foul disease, by using God's love for man as an excuse, is readily accepted by pleasure-lovers.

42. In my meditation, or rather, in my repentance, a fire of prayer will be kindled consuming the material.[3] May the holy convicts mentioned above provide you with a rule, and a pattern, and a model, and a living picture of repentance; and throughout your life you will need no book at all until Christ, the Son of God and God, enlightens you in the resurrection of true repentance. Amen.

You who are repenting have now reached the fifth step. For by repentance you have purified the five senses, and by voluntarily accepting retribution and punishment, you have escaped the punishment which is everlasting.

Step 6

On remembrance of death.

1. Every word is preceded by thought. And the remembrance of death and sins precedes weeping and mourning. Therefore, this subject comes in its proper place in this chapter.

2. The remembrance of death is a daily death; and the remembrance of our departure is an hourly sighing or groaning.

3. Fear of death is a natural instinct that comes from disobedience; but terror at death is evidence of unrepented sin. Christ fears death,[4] but does not show terror, in order to demonstrate clearly the properties of His two natures.

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[1] St. John xx, 4.
[2] I.e. that all would eventually be saved.
[3] Psalm xxxviii, 4.
[4] St. Matthew xxvi, 37.

4. As of all foods bread is the most essential, so the thought of death is the most necessary of all works. The remembrance of death amongst those in the midst of society gives birth to distress and frivolity, and even more—to despondency. But amongst those who are free from noise it produces the putting aside of cares, and constant prayer and guarding of the mind. But these same virtues both produce the remembrance of death and are also produced by it.

5. As tin is distinct from silver although it resembles it in appearance, so for the discerning there is a clear and obvious difference between the natural and supernatural fear of death.

6. A true sign of those who are mindful of death in the depth of their being is a voluntary detachment from every creature and complete renunciation of their own will.

7. He who with undoubting trust daily expects death is virtuous; but he who hourly yields himself to it is a saint.

8. Not every desire for death is good. Some, constantly sinning from force of habit, pray for death with humility. And some, who do not want to repent, invoke death out of despair. And some, out of self-esteem consider themselves dispassionate, and for a while have no fear of death. And some (if such can now be found) through the action of the Holy Spirit long for their departure.

9. . Some inquire and wonder: 'Why, when the remembrance of death is so beneficial for us, has God hidden from us the know ledge of the hour of death?'—not knowing that in this way God wonderfully accomplishes our salvation. For no one who foreknew his death would at once proceed to baptism or the monastic life; but everyone would spend all his days in iniquities, and only on the day of his death would he approach baptism and repentance. From long habit he would become confirmed in vice, and would remain utterly incorrigible.

10. Never, when mourning for your sins accept that cur[1] which suggests to you that God is tender hearted (this thought is useful only when you see yourself being dragged down to deep despair). For the aim of the enemy is to thrust from you your mourning and fearless fear.

11. He who wishes ever to retain within him the remembrance of death and judgment and God, and at the same time yields to material cares and distractions, is like a man who is swimming and wants to clap his hands.

12. A vivid remembrance of death cuts down food; and when in humility food is cut, the passions are cut out too.

13. Insensibility of heart dulls the mind, and abundance of food dries the fountains of tears. Thirst and vigil afflict the heart, and when the heart is afflicted the waters flow. The things we have said will seem cruel to epicures and incredible to the indolent; but a man of action will readily test them, and he who has found them out by experience will smile at them. But he who is still seeking will become more gloomy.

14. Just as the Fathers lay down that perfect love knows no sin, so I for my part declare that a perfect sense of death is free from fear.

15. There are many activities for an active mind. I mean, meditation on the love of God, on the remembrance of God, on the remembrance of the Kingdom, on the remembrance of the zeal of the holy martyrs, on the remembrance of God Himself present, according to him who said, 'I saw the Lord before me,'[2] on remembrance of the holy and spiritual powers, on remembrance of one's departure, judgment, punishment and sentence. We began with the sublime, but have ended with things that never fail.

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[1] I.e. the devil.

[2] Psalm xv, 8.

16. An Egyptian monk once told me: 'After I had established in my heart the remembrance of death, whenever need arose and I wanted to comfort the clay a little, this remembrance prevented me like a judge. And the wonderful thing was that, even though I wanted to thrust it away, I was quite unable to do so.'

17. Another who lived here in the place called Thola, often went into ecstasy at the thought of death; and the brothers who found him would lift him and carry him off scarcely breathing, like one who had fainted or had an epileptic fit.

18. And I cannot be silent about the story of Hesychius the Horebite. He passed his life in complete negligence, without paying the least attention to his soul. Then he became extremely ill, and for an hour he left his body. And when he came to himself he begged us all to leave him immediately. And he built up the door of his cell, and he stayed in it for twelve years without ever uttering a word to anyone, and without eating anything but bread and water. And, always remaining motionless, he was so wrapt in spirit in what he had seen in his ecstasy that he never changed his place but was always as if out of his mind, and silently shed hot tears. But when he was about to die, we broke open the door and went in, and after many questions this alone was all we heard from him: 'Forgive me! No one who has acquired the remembrance of death will ever be able to sin.' We were amazed to see that one who had before been so negligent was so suddenly transfigured by this blessed change and transformation. We reverently buried him in the cemetery near the fort[1] and after some days we looked for his holy relics, but did not find them. So by his true and praiseworthy repentance the Lord showed us that even after long negligence He accepts those who desire to amend.

19. Just as some declare that the abyss is infinite, for they call it a bottomless place, so the thought of death brings chastity and activity to a state of incorruption. The above-mentioned saint confirms the truth of what has been said. For such men, unceasingly adding fear to fear, do not stop until the very strength of their bones is spent.

20. Let us rest assured that the remembrance of death, like all other blessings, is a gift of God; since how is it that often when we are at the very tombs we are left tearless and hard; and frequently when we have no such sight, we are full of compunction?

21. He who has died to all things remembers death, but who ever is still tied to the world does not cease plotting against himself.

22. Do not wish to assure everyone in words of your love for them, but rather ask God to show them your love without words. Otherwise time will not suffice you for both intimacies and compunction.

23. Do not deceive yourself, rash worker, as if one time can make up for another. For the day is not sufficient to repay in full its own debt to the Lord.

24. It is impossible, someone says, impossible to spend the present day devoutly unless we regard it as the last of our whole life. And it is truly astonishing how even the pagans[2] have said something of the sort, since they define philosophy as meditation on death.

This is the sixth step. He who has mounted it will never sin again. Remember thy last end, and thou shalt never sin.[3]

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[1] Justinian built a fort on Mount Sinai as well as a church and monastery (Procopius, *De aedificiis*, V, viii). Today the fort is represented by the actual monastery; cf. E. A. Sophocles, *Greek Lexicon of the Roman and Byzantine Periods* (1887), *Kastron*, Clim. P.G., 88, 79A, 812B, 'now the Monastery of Mount Sinai'.

[2] Gk. *Hellēnes*.

[3] Ecclesiasticus vii, 36.

Step 7

On mourning which causes joy.

1. Mourning, according to God, is sadness of soul, and the disposition of a sorrowing heart, which ever madly seeks that for which it thirsts; and when it fails in its quest, it painfully pursues it, and follows in its wake grievously lamenting. Or thus: mourning is a golden spur in a soul which is stripped of all attachment and of all ties, fixed by holy sorrow to watch over the heart.

2. Compunction is a perennial testing of the conscience which brings about the cooling of the fire of the heart through spiritual confession. And confession is a forgetfulness of nature, if anyone because of this really forgot to eat his bread.[1]

3. Repentance is the cheerful deprival of every bodily comfort.

4. A characteristic of those who are still progressing in blessed mourning is temperance and silence of the lips, and of those who have made progress—freedom from anger and patient endurance of injuries; and of the perfect—humility, thirst for dishonours, voluntary craving for involuntary afflictions, non-condemnation of sinners, compassion even beyond one's strength. The first are acceptable, the second laudable; but blessed are those who hunger for hardship and thirst for dishonour, for they shall have their fill of the food that does not cloy.

5. If you possess the gift of mourning, hold on to it with all your might. For it is easily lost when it is not firmly established. And just as wax melts in the presence of fire, so it is easily dissolved by noise and bodily cares, and by luxury, and especially by talkativeness and levity.

6. Greater than baptism itself is the fountain of tears after baptism, even though it is somewhat audacious to say so. For baptism is the washing away of evils that were in us before, but sins committed after baptism are washed away by tears. As baptism is received in infancy, we have all defiled it, but we cleanse it anew with tears. And if God in His love for mankind had not given us tears, few indeed and hard to find would be those in a state of grace.[2]

7. Groanings and sorrows cry to the Lord. Tears shed from fear intercede for us; but tears of all-holy love show us that our prayer has been accepted.

8. If nothing goes so well with humility as mourning, certainly nothing is so opposed to it as laughter.

9. Keep a firm hold of the blessed joy-grief of holy compunction, and do not stop working at it until it raises you high above the things of this world and presents you pure to Christ.

10. Do not cease to picture and scrutinize the dark abyss of eternal fire, and the merciless servants, the unsympathetic and in exorable Judge, the bottomless pit of subterranean flame, the narrow descents to the awful underground chambers and yawning gulfs, and all such things, so that the sensuality in our soul may be checked by great terror and give place to incorruptible chastity, and itself receive the shining of the immaterial light which radiates beyond any fire.

11. During prayer and supplication stand with trembling like a convict standing before a judge, so that both by your outward appearance as well as by your inner disposition you may extinguish the wrath of the just Judge; for He will not despise a widow soul standing before Him burdened with sorrow and wearying the Unwearying One.[3]

12. He who has obtained heartfelt tears will find any place convenient for mourning. But he whose weeping is only outward show will spend endless time discussing places and manners. Just as hidden

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[1] Psalm ci, 5.
[2] Lit. 'who are being saved'.
[3] St. Luke xviii, 5.

treasure is safer from robbery than that exposed in the market, so let us apply this to what we have just said.

13. Do not be like those who in burying their dead first lament over them and then get drunk for their sake. But be like the prisoners in the mines who are flogged every hour by the gaolers.

14. He who sometimes mourns and sometimes indulges in luxury and laughter is like one who stones the dog of sensuality with bread. In appearance he is driving it away, but in fact he is encouraging it to be constantly with him.

15. Be concentrated without self-display, withdrawn into your heart. For the demons fear concentration as thieves fear dogs.

16. It is not to a wedding banquet that we have been called here—certainly not—but He who has called us has called us here to mourn for ourselves.

17. When they weep, some force themselves unseasonably to think of nothing at all during this blessed time, not realizing that tears without thought are proper only to an irrational nature and not to a rational one. Tears are the product of thought, and the father of thought is a rational mind.

18. Let your reclining in bed be for you an image of your declining into your grave—and you will sleep less. Let your refreshment at table be for you a reminder of the grim table of those worms—and you will be less luxurious. And in drinking water, do not forget the thirst of that flame—and you will certainly refuse your nature all it wants.

19. When we suffer from the Superior honourable dishonour, scolding or punishment, let us remember the fearful sentence of the Judge, and we shall kill with meekness and patience, as with a two-edged sword, the irrational sorrow and bitterness which will certainly be sown in us.

20. The sea wastes with time, as Job says.[1] And with time and patience the things of which we have spoken are gradually acquired and perfected in us.

21. Let the remembrance of the eternal fire lie down with you every evening, and let it rise with you too. Then sloth will never overwhelm you at the time of psalmody.

22. Let your very dress urge you to the work of mourning, because all who lament the dead are dressed in black. If you do not mourn, mourn for this cause. And if you mourn, lament still more that you have brought yourself down from a painless state to a painful one by your sins.

23. In the case of tears as in everything else our good and just Judge will certainly take into consideration the strength of our nature. For I have seen small tear-drops shed with difficulty like drops of blood, and I have also seen fountains of tears poured out without difficulty. And I judged those toilers more by their toil than by their tears, and I think that God does too.

24. Theology will not suit mourners, for it is of a nature to dissolve their mourning. For the theologian is like one who sits in a teacher's seat, whereas the mourner is like one who spends his days on a dung heap and in rags. That is why David, so I think, although he was a teacher and was wise, replied to those who questioned him when he was mourning: 'How shall I sing the Lord's song in a strange land?'[2] —that is to say, the land of passions.

25. Both in creation and in compunction there is that which moves itself and that which is moved by something else. When the soul becomes tearful, moist and tender without effort or trouble, then let us run, for the Lord has come uninvited, and is giving us the sponge of God-loving sorrow and the cool water of devout tears to wipe out the record of our sins. Guard these tears as the apple of your eye until

[1] Job xiv, ii.

[2] Another reading is: 'how shall we sing… (Cf. Psalm cxxxvi, 4.)

they withdraw. Great is the power of this compunction—greater than that which comes as a result of our effort and meditation.[1]

26. He who mourns when he wishes has not attained the beauty of mourning, but rather he who mourns on the subjects of his choice, and not even on these, but on what God wants. The ugly tears of vainglory are often interwoven with mourning which is pleasing to God. Acting devoutly, we shall find this out by experiment when we see ourselves mourning and still doing evil.

27. Genuine compunction is pain of soul shorn of all elation,[2] in which it gives itself no relief but hourly imagines only its dissolution; and it awaits, like cool water, the comfort of God who comforts humble monks.

28. Those who have obtained mourning in the depth of their being hate their own life as something painful and wearisome, and a cause of tears and sufferings; and they turn and flee from their body as from an enemy.

29. When we see anger and pride in those who seem to be mourning in a way pleasing to God, then their tears are to be regarded as a repugnant to God. For what fellowship has light with darkness?[3]

30. The fruit of morbid compunction is self-esteem, and the fruit of meritorious compunction is consolation.

31. Just as fire is destructive of straw, so are pure tears destructive of all material and spiritual impurity.

32. Many of the Fathers say that the question of tears, especially in the case of beginners, is an obscure matter and hard to ascertain, as tears are born in many different ways. For instance, there are tears from nature, from God, from adverse suffering, from praise worthy suffering, from vainglory, from licentiousness, from love, from the remembrance of death, and from many other causes.

33. Let us, stripped by the fear of God, train ourselves in all these ways, and acquire for ourselves pure and guileless tears over our dissolution. For there is no dissimulation or self-esteem in them, but on the contrary there is purification, progress in love for God, washing away of sin and the sublimation of the passions to dispassion.

34. It is not surprising if mourning begins with good tears and ends with bad. But it is praiseworthy if reprehensible and natural tears are sublimated to spiritual tears. People inclined to vainglory understand this problem clearly.

35. Do not trust your fountains of tears before your soul has been perfectly purified. For wine cannot be trusted when it is drawn straight from the vats.

36. No one will dispute that all our tears according to God are profitable. But we shall only know at the time of our death what the profit is.

37. He who wends his way in constant mourning according to God does not cease to feast daily; but eternal weeping awaits him who does not cease to feast bodily.

38. Convicts in prison have no joy or delight, and true monks have no feast on earth. Perhaps that is why that excellent mourner, sighing, said: 'Bring my soul out of prison[4] that it may rejoice henceforward in Thy ineffable light.'

39. Be like a king in your heart, seated high in humility, and commanding laughter: Go, and it goes; and sweet weeping: Come, and it comes; and our tyrant and slave, the body: Do this, and it does it.[1]

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[1] Note in this paragraph the difference between ascetical and mystical activity.
[2] Or, 'unwavering pain of soul'.
[3] 2 Corinthians vi, 14.
[4] Psalm cxli, 8.

40. He who is clothed in blessed and grace-given mourning as in a wedding garment knows the spiritual laughter of the soul.

41. Can anyone be found who has spent all his days in the monastic life so piously that he has never lost a day, or hour, or moment, but has spent all his time for the Lord, bearing in mind that never in your life can you see the same day twice?

42. Blessed is the monk who can lift up the eyes of his soul to the spiritual powers. But he is truly safe from falling who from the remembrance of sin and death constantly moistens his cheeks with living waters from his bodily eyes. And it is not hard for me to believe that the second condition leads on to the first.

43. I have seen shameless petitioners and beggars with clever words soon incline even the hearts of kings to compassion. And I have seen men poor and needy in virtue, with words not clever but rather humble, vague and stumbling, call shamelessly and persistently from the depths of a desperate heart upon the Heavenly King and by their violence force His inviolable nature and compassion.[2]

44. . He who in his heart is proud of his tears, and secretly condemns those who do not weep, is like a man who asks the king for a weapon against his enemy, and then commits suicide with it.

45. My friends, God does not ask or desire that man should mourn from sorrow of heart, but rather that out of love for Him he should rejoice with spiritual laughter. Remove sin, and the tear of sorrow is superfluous for your eyes of sense. What is the use of a bandage when there is no wound? Before his transgression, Adam had no tears, just as there will be none after the resurrection when sin will be abolished; for pain, sorrow and sighing will then have fled away.[3]

46. In some I have seen mourning, and in others I have seen mourning for lack of mourning. Though having it, they are as if they were without it. And through this splendid ignorance they remain inviolate; and of them it is said: The Lord makes wise the blind.[4]

47. Tears often lead frivolous people to pride, and that is why they are not given to some. And such people, seeking tears in vain, consider themselves unfortunate, and condemn themselves to sighing, lamentation, sorrow of soul, deep grief and utter dismay. All of which, though profitably regarded by them as nothing, can safely take the place of tears.

48. If we watch carefully we shall often find a bitter joke played on us by the demons. For when we are full they stir us up to compunction, and when we are fasting they harden our heart so that, being deceived by spurious tears, we may give ourselves up to indulgence which is the mother of passions. We must not listen to them but rather do the opposite.

49. When I consider the actual nature of compunction I am amazed at how that which is called mourning and grief should contain joy and gladness interwoven within it like honey in the comb. What then are we to learn from this? That such compunction is in a special sense a gift of the Lord. There is then in the soul no pleasureless pleasure, for God consoles those who are contrite in heart in a secret way. But as an inducement to most splendid mourning and profitable sorrow, let us hear a soul-profiting and most pitiful story.

50. There lived here a certain Stephen who had embraced an eremitic and solitary life, and had spent many years in the monastic training. His soul was especially adorned with tears and fasting, and was bedecked with other good achievements. He had a cell on the slope of this holy mountain where the holy prophet and seer Elijah once lived. But later this famous man resolved upon a more effective, austere and stricter repentance, and went to a place of hermits called Siddim. There he spent several

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[1] St. Matthew viii, 9.

[2] Cf. St. Matthew xi, Il; St. Luke xvi, i6.

[3] Isaiah xxxv, 10. Cf. Apocrypha vii, 17; xxi, 4.

[4] Psalm cxlv, 8.

years in a life of great austerity. This place was bereft of every comfort, and was almost untrodden by the foot of man, being about seventy miles from the fort.[1] Towards the end of his life the elder returned to his cell on the holy mountain where he had two extremely pious disciples from Palestine who took care of the elder's cell. Having passed a few days there he fell into the illness from which he died. On the day before his death, he went into ecstasy of mind and with open eyes he looked to the right and left of his bed and, as if he were being called to account by someone, in the hearing of all the bystanders he said: 'Yes indeed, that is true; but that is why I fasted for so many years.' And then again: 'Yes, it is quite true; but I wept and served the brethren.' And again: 'No, you are slandering me.' And sometimes he would say: 'Yes, it is true. Yes, I do not know what to say to this. But in God there is mercy.' And it was truly an awful and horrible sight—this in visible and merciless inquisition. And what was most terrible, he was accused of what he had not done. How amazing! Of several of his sins the hesychast and hermit said: 'I do not know what to say to this,' although he had been a monk for nearly forty years and had the gift of tears. Alas, alas! Where was then the voice of Ezekiel to say to the tormentor: 'As I find you, I will judge you, says God.'[2] Truly he could not say anything of the sort. Why? Glory to Him who alone knows! And some, as before the Lord, told me that he even fed a leopard from his hand[3] in the desert. And while being thus called to account he was parted from his body, leaving us in uncertainty as to his judgment, or end, or sentence, or how the trial ended.

51. Just as a widow bereft of her husband and having an only son finds in him her sole comfort after the Lord, so for a soul that has fallen there is no other consolation at the time of its departure but the toils of fasting and tears.

52. People like that never sing, nor do they shout loudly to themselves in songs, because such things dissipate mourning. And if you hope to summon it by such means, then you are a long way from achieving your aim. For mourning is the characteristic pain of a soul on fire.

53. In many people mourning has been the precursor of blessed dispassion, and it prepared, ploughed, and got rid of sinful matter.

54. One skilled practiser of this virtue told me: 'Frequently, as soon as I tried to surrender myself to vanity, or anger, or over-eating, the thought of mourning protested within me and said: "Do not be vain, or I shall leave you." And so too, at the urge of other passions. And I would say to the thought: "I shall never disobey you until you present me to Christ."'

55. The abyss of mourning has seen comfort, and purity of heart has received illumination. Illumination is an ineffable activity which is unknowingly perceived and invisibly seen. Comfort is the solace of a sorrowing soul which, like a child, at once both whimpers to itself and shouts happily. Divine intervention is the renewal of a soul depressed by grief which in a wonderful way transforms painful tears into painless ones.

56. Tears over our departure produce fear; and when fear begets fearlessness, joy dawns. And when joy is unfailingly obtained, holy love bursts into flower.

57. Drive away with the hand of humility every transitory joy, as being unworthy of it, lest by readily admitting it you receive a wolf instead of a shepherd.

58. Do not hasten to contemplation when it is not time for contemplation, that it may pursue and embrace the beauty of your humility, and unite with you for ever in immaculate marriage.

59. As soon as a baby begins to recognize its father, it is all filled with joy. But if the father goes away for a time on business and then comes home again, the child becomes full of joy and sorrow—joy at seeing the beloved, and sorrow at being deprived for so long of that fair beauty. And a mother

[1] See above, p. 37, note 143.
[2] Cf. Ezekiel xxxiii, 13—20. This 'unwritten saying' of Christ is recorded by St. Justin (*Dial.* 47).
[3] Another reading is: 'reared a leopard by hand'.

sometimes hides herself from her child, and when she sees with what sorrow it seeks her, she is delighted; for thus she teaches it to be attached to her for ever, and fans the flame of its love for her. He who has ears to hear, let him hear, says the Lord.[1]

60. A condemned man, who has heard the death sentence, will not worry about how theatres are managed. So too, he who is truly lamenting will never return to luxury, or glory, or anger, or irritability. Mourning is the characteristic sorrow of a penitent soul who adds sorrow to sorrow, as a woman suffers when she bears a child.

61. Just and holy is the Lord.[2] He leads him who is reasonably silent into reasonable compunction, and He daily gladdens him who is reasonably submissive. But he who does not practise rightly one of these two ways is deprived of mourning.

62. Drive away the hell-dog that comes at the time of your deepest mourning, and suggests that God is not merciful or compassionate. For if you watch it, you will find that before the sin he calls God loving, compassionate and forgiving.

63. Practice[3] produces habit, and perseverance grows into a feeling of the heart; and what is done with an ingrained feeling of the heart is not easily eradicated.

64. However great may be the life we lead, if we have not acquired a contrite heart we may count it stale and spurious. For this is essential, truly essential if I may say so, for those who have again been defiled after baptism that they should cleanse the pitch from their hands with unceasing fire of heart and with the oil of God.

65. I have seen some who had attained to the last degree of mourning; for I saw them literally pouring out of their mouths the blood of a suffering and wounded heart. And I remembered him who said: 'I am cut down like grass, and my heart is withered.'[4]

66. Tears caused by fear bring protection with them. But tears produced by love which has not attained perfection, as may happen in the case of some, are easily stolen away. Unless perhaps the memory of the eternal fire, at the times of its effective influence, should kindle the heart. And it is surprising how much safer is the humbler way in its season.

67. There are material substances which dry the fountains of our tears, and there are others which give birth to mud and reptiles in them. From the former Lot had illicit intercourse with his daughters, and from the latter the devil fell from heaven.[5]

68. Our enemies are so wicked that they turn even the mothers of virtues into the mothers of vices, and those things which make for humility, they make into a cause for pride. Frequently the very setting and sight of our dwellings are of a nature to rouse our mind to compunction. Let Jesus, Elijah and John who prayed alone convince you of this. I have often seen tears provoked in cities and crowds to make us think that crowds do us no harm and so draw nearer to the world. For this is the aim of the evil spirits.

69. One word has often dispelled mourning. But it would be a wonder indeed if one word brought it back.

70. When our soul leaves this world we shall not be blamed for not having worked miracles, or for not having been theologians or contemplatives. But we shall certainly have to give an account to God of why we have not unceasingly mourned.

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[1] St. Luke xiv, 35.

[2] Psalm cxliv, 18.

[3] I.e. practice of mourning.

[4] Psalm ci, 5.

[5] Genesis xix, 30—8. 'Materials' that dry up tears are wine and food taken to excess, while honours, power and authority are fuel for pride.

This is the seventh step. May he who has been found worthy of it help me too; for he himself has already been helped, since through this seventh step he has washed away the stains of this world.

Step 8

On freedom from anger and on meekness.

1. As the gradual pouring of water on a fire completely extinguishes the flame, so the tears of true mourning are able to quench every flame of anger and irritability. Therefore we place this next in order.

2. Freedom from anger, or placidity, is an insatiable appetite for dishonour, just as in the vainglorious there is an unbounded desire for praise. Freedom from anger is victory over nature and insensibility to insults, acquired by struggles and sweat.

3. Meekness is an immovable state of soul which remains unaffected whether in evil report or in good report, in dishonour or in praise.

4. The beginning of freedom from anger is silence of the lips when the heart is agitated; the middle is silence of the thoughts when there is a mere disturbance of soul; and the end is an imperturbable calm under the breath of unclean winds.

5. Anger is a reminder of hidden hatred, that is to say, remembrance of wrongs. Anger is a desire for the injury of the one who has provoked you. Irascibility is the untimely blazing up of the heart. Bitterness is a movement of displeasure seated in the soul. Peevishness is a changeable movement of one's disposition and disorder of soul.

6. As with the appearance of light, darkness retreats, so at the fragrance of humility all anger and bitterness vanishes.

7. Some who are prone to anger are neglectful of the healing and cure of this passion. But these unhappy people do not give a thought to him who said: 'The moment of his anger is his fall.'[1]

8. There is a quick movement of a millstone which in one moment grinds and does away with more spiritual grain and fruit than another crushes in a whole day. And so we must, with understanding, pay attention. It is possible to have such a blaze of flame, suddenly fanned by a strong wind, as will ruin the field of the heart more than a lingering flame.

9. And we ought not to forget, my friends, that the wicked demons sometimes suddenly leave us, so that we may neglect our strong passions as of little importance, and then become incurably sick.

10. As a hard stone with sharp corners has all its sharpness and hard formation crushed by knocking and rubbing against other stones, and is made round, and in the same way a sharp and curt soul, by living in community and mixing with hard, hot-tempered men, undergoes one of two things: either it cures its wound by its patience, or by retiring it will certainly discover its weakness, its cowardly flight making this clear to it as in a mirror.

11. An angry person is a wilful epileptic, who on a casual pretext keeps breaking out and falling down.

12. Nothing is so inappropriate to penitents as an agitated spirit, because conversion requires great humility, and anger is a sign of every kind of presumption.

13. If it is a mark of extreme meekness even in the presence of one's offender to be peacefully and lovingly disposed towards him in one's heart, then it is certainly a mark of hot temper when a person continues to quarrel and rage against his (absent) offender both by words and gestures, even when by himself.

[1] Ecclesiasticus i, 22.

14. If the Holy Spirit is peace of soul, as He is said to be, and as He is in reality, and if anger is disturbance of heart, as it actually is and as it is said to be, then nothing so prevents His presence in us as anger.'[1]

15. Though we know very many intolerable fruits of anger, we have only found one, its involuntary offspring, which, though illegitimate, is nevertheless useful. I have seen people flaring up madly and vomiting their long-stored malice, who by their very passion were delivered from passion, and who have obtained from their offender either penitence or an explanation of the long standing grievance. I have seen others who seemed to show a brute patience, but who were nourishing resentment within them under the cover of silence. And I considered them more pitiable than those given to raving, because they were driving away the holy white Dove with black gall. We need great care in dealing with this snake; for it too, like the snake of physical impurities, has nature collaborating with it.

16. I have seen angry people push away food, out of bitterness; and yet through their unreasonable abstinence they only added poison to poison. And I have seen others who on being disgruntled for some specious reason, gave themselves up to gluttony, and fell out of a pit headlong over a precipice.[2] But I have seen others who were sensible, who, by mixing both like good physicians, have gained from moderate consolation very great profit.

17. Sometimes singing, in moderation, successfully relieves the temper. But sometimes, if untimely and immoderate, it lends itself to the lure of pleasure. Let us then appoint definite times for this, and so make good use of it.

18. When for some reason I was sitting outside a monastery, near the cells of those living in solitude, I heard them fighting by themselves in their cells like caged partridges from bitterness and anger, and leaping at the face of their offender as if he were actually present. And I devoutly advised them not to stay in solitude in case they should be changed from human beings into demons. And I have also observed that people who are sensual and corrupt in heart are sometimes meek, what you might call flatterers, familiar, fond of outward show. And I advised these to go and adopt the life of a solitary, using this as a cure for sensuality and corruption of heart, lest from rational beings they should be pitifully changed into irrational animals. But when some of them told me that they were the wretched victims of these two passions (i.e. anger and sensuality), I absolutely forbade them to live according to their own will, but in a friendly way I suggested to their superiors that they should allow them sometimes to live in one way, sometimes in the other way of life, but that they should be entirely subject to the superior. The sensual person is liable to harm himself and perhaps one other intimate friend of his as well. But the angry person, like a wolf, often disturbs the whole flock, and offends and discourages many souls.

19. It is bad to disturb the eye of the heart by anger, according to him who said: 'My eye is troubled from anger.'[3] But it is still worse to show in words the turmoil of the soul. And to come to blows is utterly inimical and alien to the monastic, angelic and divine life.

20. If you want, or rather intend, to take a splinter out of another person, then do not hack at it with a stick instead of a lancet for you will only drive it deeper. And this is a stick—rude speech and rough gestures. And this is a lancet—tempered instruction and patient reprimand. 'Reprove,' says the Apostle, 'rebuke, exhort,'[4] but he did not say 'beat'. And if even this is required, do it rarely, and not with your own hand (i.e. use the agency of another).[5]

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[1] Or, 'His coming to us'.

[2] I.e. Out of the pit of anger into the precipice of gluttony.

[3] Psalm vi, 8.

[4] Timothy iv, 2.

[5] The words in parenthesis occur only in the Russian version.

21. If we are observant we shall see that many irritable people are practising vigils, fasts and silence. For the aim of the demons is to suggest to them, under the pretext of penance and mourning, just what is likely to increase their passion.

22. If, as we said above, a single wolf with the help of a demon can trouble a flock, then certainly one most wise brother with the help of an angel can make the waves abate and the ship sail calmly, by pouring, as it were, a good skin full of oil on the waters.[1] And the condemnation of the former is indeed heavy, and equally great is the reward that the latter will receive from God, and he will become an edifying example for all.

23. The beginning of blessed patience is to accept dishonour with sorrow and bitterness of soul. The middle stage is to be free from pain in the midst of these things. But perfection (if it is possible) is to regard dishonour as praise. Let the first rejoice; let the second be strong; blessed is the third, for he exults in the Lord.

24. I have noticed what a sorry sight angry people presented due to their self-esteem, though they themselves were unaware of this. For they get into a state of anger and then they become still more angry at their defeat. And I was astonished to see how one fall was punished by another, and I pitied them as I saw them avenging sin by sin. I was horrified at the demons' trickery, and nearly despaired of my own life.

25. If anyone has noticed that he is easily overcome by conceit and sharp temper, malice and hypocrisy, and has thought of defending himself against them by drawing the two-edged sword of meekness and patience, then if he wishes to be completely freed from these vices he should go and live in a monastic community as in a fuller's shop of salvation. He should especially choose the most austere. Then he will be spiritually stretched and beaten by the insults, slights and surging rebuffs of the brethren, and perhaps even sometimes physically thrashed, trampled on and kicked, and so he may wash out the filth which is still in the perceptive part of his soul. You should believe the popular saying that reproof is the washtub for the passions of the soul. For when people in the world overwhelm someone to his face with indignities, and then boast of this before others, they say: 'I gave him a scrubbing.' And this is perfectly true.

26. Freedom from anger in novices as a result of mourning is one thing; the tranquillity that is found in the perfect is another. In the former, anger is held in by tears as by a bridle; but in the latter it has been mortified by dispassion, as a snake is killed by a sword.

27. I once saw three monks receive the same injury at the same time. One felt the sting of this, but kept silent; the second rejoiced at his injury for the reward it would bring him, but was sorry for the wrongdoer; and the third, thinking of the harm his erring neighbour was suffering, wept fervently. And fear, reward and love were to be seen at work.

28. Bodily fever is one thing, but the occasions of this are not one but many. So also the boiling up of anger and the movement of our other passions have many and various causes. That is why it is impossible to prescribe one identical rule for them. Instead I would rather suggest that each of those who are sick should most carefully seek out his own particular cure. The first step in the cure should be a diagnosis of the cause of each disease; for when this is discovered, the patients will get the right cure from God's care and from their spiritual physicians. And so, for instance, those who wish to join us in the Lord should enter the spiritual tribunal provided, and there we should test ourselves in a general way concerning the above-mentioned passions or their causes.

29. So let the tyrant anger be bound with the chains of meekness and be beaten by patience, and dragged out by holy love; and, being arraigned before this court of reason, let it be duly examined: 'Tell us, base idiot, what is the name of the father who begot you and the mother who brought you for evil

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[1] Our author is speaking allegorically. By 'skin' he means the body, by 'oil' he means meekness, and by 'waves', pride and anger. The 'ship' may mean the community, or brotherhood, or just a single person.

into the world, and the names of your foul sons and daughters. And not only that, but tell us the designations of those who wage war against you and kill you.' And anger tells us in reply: 'Many are my origins, and I have more than one father. My mothers are vainglory, love of money, greed, and sometimes lust. My father is called conceit. My daughters are: remembrance of wrongs, hatred, enmity, and assertion of rights. But my opponents, who are now holding me captive, are the opposite virtues of freedom from anger and meekness. She who schemes against me is called humility. But as to who bore humility, ask her in due time her self.'

For the eighth step is appointed the crown of freedom from anger. He who wears it by nature will perhaps wear no other crown. But he who has won it by sweat has conquered all eight together.

Step 9

On remembrance of wrongs.[1]

1. The holy virtues are like Jacob's ladder, and the unholy vices are like the chains that fell from the chief Apostle Peter. For the virtues, leading from one to another, bear him who chooses them up to Heaven; but the vices by their nature beget and stifle one another. And as we have just heard senseless anger calling remembrance of wrongs its own offspring, it is appropriate that we should now say something about this.

2. Remembrance of wrongs is the consummation of anger, the keeper of sins, hatred of righteousness, ruin of virtues, poison of the soul, worm of the mind, shame of prayer, stopping of supplication, estrangement of love, a nail stuck in the soul, pleasureless feeling beloved in the sweetness of bitterness, continuous sin, unsleeping transgression, hourly malice.

3. This dark and hateful passion, I mean remembrance of wrongs, is one of those that are produced but have no offspring. That is why we do not intend to say much about it.

4. He who has put a stop to anger has also destroyed remembrance of wrongs; because childbirth continues only while the father is alive.

5. He who has obtained love has banished revenge; but he who nurses enmities stores up for himself endless sufferings.

6. A banquet of love dispels hatred, and sincere gifts soothe a soul. But an ill-regulated banquet is the mother of boldness, and through the window of love gluttony leaps in.

7. I have seen hatred break the bond of long-standing fornication, and afterwards remembrance of wrongs, in an amazing way, did not allow the severed union to be renewed. Wonderful sight—a demon curing a demon! But perhaps this is the work not of demons but of Divine Providence.

8. Remembrance of wrongs is far from strong natural love, but fornication easily comes near it, just as a hidden louse can some times be seen in a dove.

9. Be malicious and spiteful against the demons, and be at constant enmity with your body. The flesh is a headstrong and treacherous friend. The more you care for it, the more it injures you.

10. Remembrance of wrongs is an interpreter of Scripture of the kind that adjusts the words of the Spirit to its own views. Let it be put to shame by the Prayer of Jesus[2] which cannot be said with it.

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[1] Or, 'resentment', 'malice', 'rancour', 'spite'.

[2] The 'Prayer of Jesus' used in the Orthodox Church is 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me'. What is said in this paragraph applies equally to the Lord's Prayer, especially the clause 'forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors'.

11. When, after much struggling, you are still unable to extract this thorn, you should apologize to your enemy, even if only in word. Then perhaps you may be ashamed of your long-standing insincerity towards him, and, as your conscience stings you like fire, you may feel perfect love towards him.

12. You will know that you have completely got rid of this rot,[1] not when you pray for the person who has offended you, nor when you exchange presents with him, nor when you invite him to your table, but only when, on hearing that he has fallen into spiritual or bodily misfortune, you suffer and weep for him as for yourself.

13. A malicious anchorite[2] is an adder hidden in a hole, which carries about within itself deadly poison.

14. The remembrance of Jesus' sufferings cures remembrance of wrongs which is mightily shamed by His forbearance.

15. Worms grow in a rotten tree, and malice finds a place in falsely meek and silent people. He who has cast it out has found forgiveness, but he who sticks to it is deprived of mercy.

16. Some, for the sake of forgiveness, give themselves up to labours and struggles, but a man who is forgetful of wrongs excels them. If you forgive quickly, then you will be generously forgiven.[3]

17. The forgetting of wrongs is a sign of true repentance. But he who dwells on them and thinks that he is repenting is like a man who thinks he is running while he is really asleep.

18. I have seen resentful people recommend forgiveness to others. Yes, and being put to shame by their own words, they rid themselves of the passion.

19. Let no one regard dark spite as a harmless passion, for it often manages to reach out even to spiritual men.

The ninth step. Let him who has reached it boldly ask the Saviour Jesus for release from his sins for the future.

Step 10

On slander or calumny.

1. No sensible person, I think, will dispute that slander is born of hatred and malice. Therefore it comes next in order after its forebears.

2. Slander is an offspring of hatred, a subtle yet coarse disease, a leech lurking unfelt, wasting and draining the blood of charity. It is simulation of love, the patron of a heavy and unclean heart, the ruin of chastity.

3. Some girls do wrong without shame, and there are others who secretly and with apparently great modesty behave still worse than the former; and it is the same with shameful passions.[4] There are many insincere maidens, such as: hypocrisy, vice, melancholy, the remembrance of injuries, disparagement of others in one's heart. They appear to propose one thing, but they have something else in view.

4. I have heard people slandering, and I have rebuked them. And these doers of evil replied in self-defence that they were doing so out of love and care for the person whom they were slandering. I said

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[1] Vices are forms of decay or corruption.

[2] Or, 'hesychast'.

[3] Cf. St Luke vi, 37.

[4] Romans i, 26.

to them: 'Stop that kind of love, otherwise you will be condemning as a liar him who said: "Him who secretly slanders his neighbour, him I drove away."[1] If you say you love, then pray secretly, and do not mock the man. For this is the kind of love that is acceptable to the Lord. But I will not hide this from you (and of course think about it, and do not judge the offender): Judas was in the company of Christ's disciples, and the Robber was in the company of murderers. And what a reversal when the crisis came!'

5. He who wants to overcome the spirit of slander, should not ascribe the blame to the person who falls, but to the demon who suggests it. For no one really wants to sin against God, even though we do all sin without being forced to do so.

6. I have known a man who sinned openly and repented secretly. I condemned him as a profligate, but he was chaste before God, having propitiated Him by a genuine conversion.

7. Do not regard the feelings of a person who speaks to you about his neighbour disparagingly, but rather say to him: 'Stop, brother! I fall into graver sins every day, so how can I criticize him?' In this way you will achieve two things: you will heal yourself and your neighbour with one plaster. This is one of the shortest ways to the forgiveness of sins; I mean, not to judge. 'Judge not, that you be not judged.'[2]

8. Fire and water are incompatible; and so is judging others in one who wants to repent. If you see someone falling into sin at the very moment of his death, even then do not judge him, because the Divine judgment is hidden from men. Some have fallen openly into great sins, but they have done greater good deeds in secret; so their critics were tricked, getting smoke instead of the sun.

9. Listen to me, listen, all you malicious reckoners of other men's accounts! If it is true (as it really is true) that 'with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged',[3] then whatever sins we blame our neighbour for, whether bodily or spiritual, we shall fall into them ourselves. That is certain.

10. Hasty and severe judges of the sins of their neighbour fall into this predicament because they have not yet attained to a thorough and constant remembrance and concern for their own sins. For if anyone could see his own vices accurately without the veil of self-love, he would worry about nothing else in this life, considering that he would not have time enough for mourning for himself even though he were to live a hundred years, and even though he were to see a whole river Jordan of tears streaming from his eyes. I have observed that mourning, and I did not find in it even a trace of calumny or criticism.

11. The demons, murderers as they are, push us into sin. Or if they fail to do this, they get us to pass judgment on those who are sinning, so that they may smear us with the stain which we our selves are condemning in another.

12. This is one of the marks by which we can recognize malicious and slanderous people: they are plunged in the spirit of hatred, and with pleasure and without a qualm they slander the teaching or affairs or achievements of their neighbour.

13. I have seen some committing the gravest sins in secret and without exposure, and in their supposed purity they have harshly inveighed against persons who have had a petty fall in public.

14. To judge others is a shameless arrogation of the Divine prerogative; to condemn is the ruin of one's soul.

15. Self-esteem without any other passion can ruin a man, and in the same way, if we have formed the habit of judging, we can be utterly ruined by this alone, for indeed the Pharisee was condemned for this very thing.

[1] Psalm c, 5.
[2] St. Luke vi, 37.
[3] St. Matthew vii, 2.

16. A good grape-picker, who eats the ripe grapes, will not start gathering unripe ones. A charitable and sensible mind takes careful note of whatever virtues it sees in anyone. But a fool looks for faults and defects. And of such it is said: 'They have searched out iniquity and expired in the search.'[1]

17. Do not condemn, even if you see with your eyes, for they are often deceived.

The tenth ascent. He who has mastered it is one who practises love or mourning.

Step 11

On talkativeness and silence.

1. In the preceding chapter we spoke briefly of how extremely dangerous it is to judge others and of how this vice steals into even the most apparently spiritual people; and how it is better to subject oneself to condemnation and punishment by the tongue. Now we must show the cause of this vice, and give a proper account of the door by which it enters, or rather, goes out.

2. Talkativeness is the throne of vainglory on which it loves to show itself and make a display. Talkativeness is a sign of ignorance, a door to slander, a guide to jesting, a servant of falsehood, the ruin of compunction, a creator of despondency, a precursor of sleep, the dissipation of recollection, the abolition of watchfulness, the cooling of ardour, the darkening of prayer.

3. Deliberate silence is the mother of prayer, a recall from captivity, preservation of fire, a supervisor of thoughts, a watch against enemies, a prison of mourning, a friend of tears, effective remembrance of death, a depicter of punishment, a meddler with judgment, an aid to anguish, an enemy of freedom of speech, a companion of quiet, an opponent of desire to teach, increase of knowledge, a creator of contemplation, unseen progress, secret ascent.

4. He who has become aware of his sins has controlled his tongue, but a talkative person has not yet got to know himself as he should.

5. The friend of silence draws near to God, and by secretly conversing with Him, is enlightened by God.

6. The silence of Jesus put Pilate to shame, and by a man's stillness vainglory is vanquished.

7. Peter, having said a word, lamented it bitterly, because he forgot him who said: 'I said, I will take heed to my ways that I sin not with my tongue,"[2] and the other who said: 'A fall from a height to the ground is better than a slip with the tongue.[3]

8. I do not wish to write much about this, even though the wiles of the passions urge me to do so. But I once heard from someone who asked me about silence that talkativeness is in variably born of one of the following causes: either from a bad, lax environment and habit (for the tongue, said he, being a member of the body, like the rest of the members, requires the training of habit), or again, in the case of ascetics, garrulity comes especially from vainglory, and sometimes also from gluttony. That is why many who bridle the stomach by force afterwards easily check the tongue and its chatter.

9. He who is anxious about his departure, cuts down words; and he who has obtained spiritual mourning, shuns talkativeness like fire.

10. He who has come to love silence shuts his mouth, but he who delights in wandering about outside is driven out of his cell by his passion.

[1] Psalm lxiii, 7.
[2] Psalm xxxviii, 1.
[3] Ecclesiasticus xx, iS.

11. He who knows the fragrance of the Fire from on high, runs from a concourse of men like a bee from smoke; for the bee is routed by smoke, whereas man is hampered by company.

12. Few can hold water without a sluice; still fewer can tame an intemperate mouth.

The eleventh step. He who has mastered it has cut off at one blow a multitude of evils.

Step 12

On lying.

1. The offspring of flint and steel is fire; and the offspring of chatter and joking is lying.

2. A lie is the destruction of love, and perjury is a denial of God.

3. Let no one with right principles suppose that the sin of lying is a small matter, for the All-Holy Spirit pronounced the most awful sentence of all against it above all sins. If Thou wilt destroy all who tell lies, as David says to God, what will they suffer who stitch an oath on to a lie?

4. I have seen some who, priding themselves on their skill in lying, and exciting laughter by their jests and twaddle, have pitiably destroyed in their hearers the habit of mourning.

5. When the demons see that in the very beginning we intend to keep aloof from the witty lecture of a coarse leader, as from an infectious disease, then they try to catch us by two thoughts, suggesting to us: 'Do not offend the story-teller,' or: 'Do not appear to love God more than they do.' Be off! Do not dally, otherwise at the time of your prayer the jokes will recur to your mind. And not only run, but even piously disconcert the bad company by offering for their general attention the thought of death and judgment. For perhaps it is better for you to be sprinkled with a few drops of vainglory, if only you can become a channel of profit for many.

6. Hypocrisy is the mother of lying and often its purpose. For some define hypocrisy as no other than meditation on falsehood, and an inventor of falsehood which has a reprehensible oath twisted up with it.

7. He who has obtained the fear of the Lord has forsaken lying, having within himself an incorruptible judge—his own conscience.

8. We notice various degrees of harm in all the passions, and this is certainly the case with lying. There is one judgment for him who lies through fear of punishment, and another for him who lies when no danger is at hand.

9. One lies for sheer wantonness, another for amusement; one, to make the bystanders laugh; and another, to trap his brother and do him injury.

10. Lying is wiped out by the tortures of superiors; but it is finally destroyed by an abundance of tears.

11. He who gives way to lying does so under the pretext of care for others and often regards the destruction of his soul as an act of charity. The inventor of lies makes out that he is an imitator of Rahab,[1] and says that by his own destruction he is effecting the salvation of others.

12. When we are completely cleansed of lying, then we can resort to it, but only with fear and as occasion demands.

13. A babe knows nothing of lying; neither does a soul that is stripped of evil.

[1] Joshua ii, 1 ff.

14. He who has become merry with wine involuntarily speaks the truth on all subjects, and he who is drunk with compunction cannot lie.

The twelfth step. He who has mounted it has obtained the root of all blessings.

Step 13

On despondency.[1]

1. As we have already frequently said, this—we mean despondency—is very often one of the branches of talkativeness, and its first child. And so we have given it its appropriate place in this chain of vices.

2. Despondency is a slackness of soul, a weakening of the mind, neglect of asceticism, hatred of the vow made. It is the blessing of worldlings. It accuses God of being merciless and without love for men. It is being languid in singing psalms, weak in prayer, stubbornly bent on service, resolute in manual labour, indifferent in obedience.

3. A person under obedience does not know despondency, having achieved spiritual things by means of sensory things.

4. Community life is opposed to despondency. But she is a constant companion of the hermit.[2] She will never leave him till his death, and wrestles with him daily till his end. Seeing an anchorite's cell, she smiles, and creeps up and camps near by.

5. A doctor visits the sick in the morning, but despondency visits ascetics about noonday.[3]

6. Despondency is a pretext for hospitality. She insists that by means of manual labour, alms could be given; and she urges us eagerly to visit the sick, recalling Him who said, I was sick and you visited Me.[4] She puts it into our heads to go out visiting the dejected and faint-hearted, and sets one faintheart to comfort another.

7. She reminds those standing at prayer of necessary duties. And, brutish as she is, she leaves no stone unturned to find some plausible pretext to drag us from prayer as with a kind of halter.

8. At the third hour the demon of despondency produces shivering, headache, and even colic. At the ninth hour the sick man gathers his strength. And when the table is laid he jumps out of bed. But the hour of prayer has come; again the body is weighed down. He had begun to pray, but it steeps him in sleep, and tears his response to shreds with untimely yawns.[5]

9. Each of the other passions is destroyed by some particular virtue. But despondency for the monk is a general death.

10. A courageous soul resurrects his dying mind, but despondency and sloth squander all his riches.

11. Since despondency is one of the eight capital vices, and moreover the gravest, let us deal with it just as we have dealt with the others; but let us only add this. When there is no psalmody, then despondency does not make its appearance. And as soon as the appointed Office is finished, the eyes open.

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[1] More exactly, 'On accidie'. It means 'languor', 'torpor', 'tedium', 'spiritual gloom', 'low spirits', 'indifference to the work of salvation', 'distaste for spiritual things', 'spiritual sloth'.

[2] Or, 'hesychast'.

[3] Cf. Psalm xc, 6, 'the noonday devil'.

[4] St. Matthew xxv, 36.

[5] Lit. 'snatches the verse from his mouth with untimely yawns'.

12. Spiritual heroes[1] come to light at the time of despondency, for nothing procures so many crowns for a monk as the battle with despondency.

13. Observe, and you will find that if you stand on your feet despondency will battle with you. If you sit, it will suggest that it is better for you to lean back; and it urges you to lean against the wall of the cell; then it persuades you to peep out of the window, by producing noises and footsteps.

14. He who mourns over himself does not know despondency.

15. Let this tyrant be bound by the remembrance of your sins. Let us buffet him by manual labour. He should be brought into court by the thought of blessings to come. And when brought as before a tribunal let him be duly questioned:

16. 'Tell me, you nerveless, shuffling fellow, who viciously spawned you? Who are your offspring? Who are your foes? Who is your destroyer?' And despondency, under compulsion, may be thought to reply: 'Among those who are truly obedient I have nowhere to lay my head; but with those amongst whom I have a place for myself, I live quietly. I have many mothers: sometimes insensibility of soul, sometimes forgetfulness of the things above, sometimes excessive troubles. My offspring who abide with me are: changing from place to place, disobedience to one's spiritual father, forgetfulness of the judgement, and sometimes breach of the vow. And my opponents, by whom I am now bound, are psalmody and manual labour. My enemy is the thought of death. What completely mortifies me is prayer with firm hope of future blessings. And who gave birth to prayer? Ask her.'

This is the thirteenth victory. He who has really gained it has become experienced in all good.

Step 14

On the clamorous , yet wicked master – the stomach.[2]

1. We have been attacking ourselves in everything that we have said, but this is specially so when we speak about the stomach. For I wonder if anyone has got free of this master before settling in the grave.

2. Gluttony is hypocrisy of the stomach; for when it is glutted it complains of scarcity, and when it is loaded and bursting it cries out that it is hungry.

3. Gluttony is a deviser of seasonings, a source of sweet dishes. You stop one jet, and it bobs up elsewhere; you plug this too, and you open another.

4. Gluttony is a delusion of the eyes which receives in moderation but wants to gobble everything at once.

5. Satiety in food is the father of fornication; but mortification of the stomach is an agent of purity.

6. He who fondles a lion often tames it, but he who coddles the body makes it still wilder.

7. The Jew rejoices on Sabbaths and feast days; and a monk who is a glutton on Saturdays and Sundays. He counts beforehand the days till Easter, and he prepares the food for it several days in advance. The slave of his belly calculates with what dishes he will celebrate the feast, but the servant of God considers with what graces he may be enriched.

8. If a stranger comes, the slave of the stomach is moved to love entirely from gluttony, and he regards laxity for himself as consolation for his brother. When others are present, he deems it right to allow himself wine; and thinking to hide his virtue, he becomes a slave of passion.

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[1] Lit. 'the violent'. St. Matthew xi, 12.

[2] The title varies slightly in different texts.

9. Often vanity proves an enemy of gluttony, and they quarrel between themselves for the wretched monk as for a purchased slave. The one urges him to relax, while the other proposes that he should make his virtue triumph. The wise monk will shun both, at the right time shaking off each passion by the other.

10. As long as the flesh is still lusty, let us observe temperance at all times and in every place. When it has been pacified (which I do not suppose is possible this side of the grave), then let us hide our accomplishment.

11. I have seen aged priests bewitched by the demons; and on the feasts they gave their blessing to young men not under their direction to use wine and all the rest. If those who give permission have a good witness in the Lord (i.e. are spiritual), then let us also permit ourselves within limits. But if they are negligent, let us not give a thought to their blessing, especially when we are in the actual heat of the struggle with our flesh.

12. Evagrius,[1] afflicted by an evil spirit, imagined himself to be the wisest of the wise both in thought and expression. But he was deceived, poor man, and proved to be the most foolish of fools in this among other things. For he says: 'When our soul desires different foods, then confine it to bread and water.' To prescribe this is like saying to a child: 'Go up the whole ladder in one stride.' And so, rejecting his rule, let us say: When our soul desires different foods, it is demanding what is proper to its nature. Therefore, let us also use cunning against our unscrupulous foe. And unless a very severe conflict is on us, or amends for falls, let us for a while only deny ourselves fattening foods, then heating foods, and only then what makes our food pleasant. If possible, give your stomach satisfying and digestible food, so as to satisfy its insatiable hunger by sufficiency, and so that we may be delivered from excessive desire, as from a scourge, by quick assimilation. If we look into the matter, we shall find that most of the foods which inflate the stomach also excite the body.

13. Laugh at the demon who, after supper, suggests that you should take your meal later in future; for the next day at the ninth hour he will change the arrangements of the previous day.

14. One kind of temperance is suitable for those who behave irreproachably, and another for those subject to weaknesses. For the former, a movement in the body is a signal for restraint; but the latter are affected by such movements without relief or relaxation till their very death and end. The former always wish to preserve peace of mind, and the latter propitiate God by spiritual lamentation and contrition.

15. The perfect find their time of gladness and consolation in the attainment of dispassion in all things; the warrior-ascetic enjoys the heat of the battle; but the slave of the passions revels in the Feast of feasts and the Triumph of triumphs.[2]

16. The heart of gluttons dreams only of food and eatables, but the heart of those who weep dreams of judgment and castigation.

17. Master your stomach before it masters you; and then you are sure to control yourself with the aid of shame. Those who have fallen into the horrible gulf know what I have said; but men who are eunuchs have not experienced this.

18. Let us prune the stomach by thought of the future fire. For some who were servants of their stomach have cut their members right off, and died a double death. If we go into the matter, we shall find that it is the stomach alone that is the cause of all human shipwreck.

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[1] The fourth century Evagrius of Pontus was a follower of Origen and was condemned with him in the 5th Ecumenical Council in 553.

[2] In the Orthodox Church the Paschal Festival or Easter is known as the Feast of feasts and Triumph of triumphs. It is preceded by a fast of forty-nine days inclusive of Passion Week. There is no fasting in Easter Week, hence the glutton rejoices.

19. The mind of a faster prays soberly, but the mind of an intemperate person is filled with impure idols.[1]

20. Satiety of the stomach dries the tear springs, but the stomach when dried produces these waters.

21. He who cherishes his stomach and hopes to overcome the spirit of fornication, is like one who tries to put out a fire with oil.

22. By stinting the stomach the heart is humbled, but by pleasing the stomach the mind becomes proud.

23. Keep watch over yourself early in the morning, at midday, and for an hour before taking food, and you will realize the value of fasting. In the morning, thought leaps and runs from one thing to another. With the approach of the sixth hour of the day it becomes somewhat quieter; and by sunset it is completely at peace.

24. Stint your stomach and you will certainly lock your mouth, because the tongue is strengthened by a lot of food. Struggle with all your might against the stomach and restrain it with all sobriety. If you labour a little, the Lord also will soon work with you.

25. Leather bottles get greater capacity if they are supple, but if they are left in neglect they do not hold so much. He who burdens his stomach with food, distends his inside; but he who wars with his stomach contracts it. And when the inside is contracted, then we cannot take much, and for the future we become fasters naturally.

26. Thirst is often stopped by thirst; but it is difficult to cut off hunger by hunger, and even impossible. When the stomach overcomes you, tame it by labours. And if this is impossible owing to weakness, struggle with it by vigil. If the eyes become heavy, take up manual labour; but if sleep is not upon you, do not touch manual labour, because it is impossible to occupy the mind with God and Mammon, that is, both with God and manual labour.

27. Know that often a devil settles in the belly and does not let the man be satisfied even though he has devoured a whole Egypt and drunk a river Nile. But after taking food this unclean spirit goes away, and sends against us the spirit of fornication, telling him of our condition and saying: 'Catch, catch, hound him; for when the stomach is full, he will not resist much.' With a smile the spirit of fornication comes, and having bound us hand and foot by sleep, does with us all he pleases, defiling soul and body with its impurities, dreams, and emissions.

28. It is amazing to see the bodiless mind defiled and darkened by the body, and likewise the immaterial spirit purified and refined through clay.

29. If you have promised Christ to go by the strait and narrow way, restrain your stomach, because by pleasing it and enlarging it, you break your contract. Attend and you will hear Him who says: 'Spacious and broad is the way of gluttony that leads to the perdition of fornication, and many there are who go in by it; because narrow is the gate and hard is the way of fasting that leads to the life of purity, and few there are who go in by it."[2]

30. The prince of demons is the fallen Lucifer, and the prince of passions is gluttony.

31. When sitting at a table laden with food, remember death and judgment, for even so you will only check the passion slightly. In taking drink, do not cease to imagine the vinegar and gall of your Lord. And you will certainly either be temperate, or you will sigh and humble your mind.

32. Do not be deceived: you will not be delivered from Pharaoh, and you will not see the heavenly Passover, unless you continually eat bitter herbs and unleavened bread. And bitter herbs—this is the coercion and pain of fasting; and unleavened bread—this is a mind that is not puffed up. Let this be

[1] Or 'images'. Gk. *eidōla*

[2] St. Matthew vii, 13—14.

knit to your breathing, the word of him who says: 'But I, when demons troubled me, put on sackcloth, and humbled my soul with fasting, and my prayer stuck to the bosom of my soul.'[1]

33. Fasting is the coercion of nature and the cutting out of everything that delights the palate, the prevention of lust, the uprooting of bad thoughts, deliverance from dreams, purity of prayer, the light of the soul, the guarding of the mind, deliverance from blindness, the door of compunction, humble sighing, glad contrition, a lull in chatter, a means to silence, a guard of obedience, lightening of sleep, health of body, agent of dispassion, remission of sins, the gate of Paradise and its delight.

34. Let us ask this foe, or rather this supreme chief of our misfortunes, this door of passions, this fall of Adam, this ruin of Esau, this destruction of the Israelites, this laying naked of Noah's shame, this betrayer of Gomorrah, this reproach of Lot, this death of the sons of Eli, this guide to impurity—let us ask him: From whom is he born? Who are his offspring? Who crushes him? And who finally destroys him?

35. 'Tell us, tormentor of all mortals, who has bought all with the gold of greed: How did you get access to us? And what do you usually produce after your coming? And what is the manner of your departure from us?'

36. And gluttony, annoyed by these insults, raving with fury against us and foaming, replies: 'Why are you who are my underlings overwhelming me with reproaches? How are you trying to get separated from me? I am bound to you by nature. The door for me is the nature of foods. The cause of my insatiability is habit. The foundation of my passion is repeated habit, insensibility of soul and forgetfulness of death. How do you seek to learn the names of my offspring? If I count them, they will be more in number than the sand. But learn at least the names of my first born and beloved children. My first-born son is a minister of fornication, the second after him is hardness of heart, and the third is sleepiness. From me proceed a sea of bad thoughts, waves of filth, depths of unknown and unnamed impurities. My daughters are laziness, talkativeness, familiarity in speech, jesting, facetiousness, contradiction, a stiff neck, obstinacy, disobedience, insensibility, captivity, conceit, audacity, boasting, after which follows impure prayer, whirling of thoughts, and often unexpected and sudden misfortunes, with which is closely bound despair, the most evil of all my daughters. The remembrance of falls resists me but does not conquer me. The thought of death is always hostile to me, but there is nothing among men that destroys me completely. He who has received the Comforter prays to Him against me; and the Comforter, when appealed to, does not allow me to act passionately. But those who have not tasted His gift inevitably seek their pleasure in my sweetness.'

The victory (over this vice) is a courageous one. He who is able, let him hasten to dispassion and to the highest degree of chastity.

Step 15

On incorruptible purity and chastity to which the corruptible attain by toil and sweat.[2]

Foreword

We have heard from that raving mistress gluttony who has just spoken, that her offspring is war against bodily chastity. And this is not surprising since our ancient forefather Adam teaches us this too. For if he had not been overcome by his stomach he would not have known what a wife was.[3] That is why those who keep the first commandment do not fall into the second transgression. And they

[1] Psalm xxxiv, 13.
[2] Texts vary here.
[3] I.e. he would have lived with her as with a sister.

continue to be children of Adam without knowing what Adam has been since his fall. But they are a little lower than the angels (in being subject to death).[1] And this is to prevent evil from becoming immortal, as he who is called the Theologian says.[2]

1. Purity means that we put on the angelic nature. Purity is the longed-for house of Christ and the earthly heaven of the heart. Purity is a supernatural denial of nature, which means that a mortal and corruptible body is rivalling the celestial spirits in a truly marvellous way.

2. He is pure who expels love with love and who has extinguished the material fire by the immaterial fire.[3]

3. Chastity is the name which is common to all the virtues.

4. He is chaste who even during sleep feels no movement or change of any kind in his constitution.

5. He is chaste who has continually acquired perfect insensibility to difference in bodies.

6. The rule and limit of absolute and perfect purity is to be equally disposed towards animate and inanimate bodies, rational and irrational.

7. Let no one thoroughly trained in purity attribute its attainment to himself. For it is impossible for anyone to conquer his own nature. When nature is defeated, it should be recognized that this is due to the presence of Him who is above nature. For beyond all dispute, the weaker gives way to the stronger.

8. The beginning of purity is the refusal to have anything to do with bad thoughts and occasional dreamless emissions; the middle state of purity is natural movements due to excess of food, but without dreams and emissions; and the end of purity is the mortification of the body after previously mortifying bad thoughts.

9. Truly blessed is he who has acquired perfect insensibility to every body and colour and beauty.

10. Not he who has kept his clay undefiled is pure, but he whose members are completely subject to his soul.[4]

11. He is great who remains free from passion when touched. But greater is he who remains unwounded by sight, and who has conquered the fire caused by the beauties of earth by meditation on the beauties of heaven.

12. He who drives away this dog by prayer is like someone fighting with a lion; he who subdues him by his resistance is someone still pursuing his enemy; but he who has once for all reduced its appeal to nothing, even though he is still in the flesh, is as one who has already risen from his coffin.

13. If a sign of true purity is to be unmoved by dreams during sleep, then it is certainly a mark of sensuality to be subject to emissions from (impure) thoughts when awake.

14. He who fights this adversary by bodily hardship and perspiration is like one who has tied his foe to a dry branch. But he who opposes him by temperance, sleeplessness and vigil is like one who puts a dog-collar on him. He who opposes him by humility, freedom from irritability and thirst is like one who has killed his enemy and hidden him in the sand. And by sand I mean humility, because it produces no fodder for the passions but is mere earth and ashes.

15. One keeps this tormentor bound by struggles, another by humility, and another by divine revelation. The first resembles the morning star, the second the full moon, and the third the blazing

[1] The words in brackets are not in some versions.

[2] St. Gregory Nazianzen.

[3] Or, 'he is pure who expels fleshly love with divine love, and who has extinguished the fire of passion by the fire of heaven (i.e. the Holy Spirit).'

[4] Another reading of the second half of the sentence is: 'but he whose members are subject to his soul is perfect'.

sun; and they all have their home in heaven. But from the dawn comes light, and in the light the sun rises. So too with what has been said, we can reflect and make discoveries.

16. A fox pretends to be asleep, and the body and demons pretend to be chaste; the former in order to deceive a bird, and the latter in order to destroy a soul.

17. Throughout your life, do not trust your body,[1] and do not rely on it till you stand before Christ.

18. Do not trust to abstinence not to fall. One who had never eaten was cast from heaven.[2]

19. Certain learned men have well defined renunciation, by saying that it is hostility to the body and a fight against the stomach.

20. With beginners falls usually occur by reason of luxury; with intermediates because of haughtiness as well as from the same cause which leads to the fall of beginners; and with those approaching perfection, solely from judging their neighbour.

21. Some have extolled those who are eunuchs by nature because they are delivered from the martyrdom of the body; but I daily extol those who make themselves eunuchs by castrating their bad thoughts as with a knife.[3]

22. I have seen people who fell unwillingly, and I have seen people who would willingly fall but cannot. And I pitied the latter much more than those who fall daily; because even though impotent, they yearn for the stench.

23. He who falls is to be pitied. But still more to be pitied is he who causes another to fall, because he bears the burden of both, and further, the burden of pleasure tasted by the other.[4]

24. Do not expect to confute the demon of fornication by arguing with him; for with nature on his side, he has the best of the argument.

25. He who has resolved to contend with his flesh and conquer it himself struggles in vain. For unless the Lord destroys the house of the flesh and builds the house of the soul, the man who desires to destroy it has watched and fasted in vain.[5]

26. Offer to the Lord the weakness of your nature, fully acknowledging your own incapacity, and you will receive imperceptibly the gift of chastity.

27. In sensual people (as one who had experienced this passion personally told me after he had got over it) there is a feeling of a sort of love for bodies and a kind of shameless and inhuman spirit which openly asserts itself in the very feeling of the heart. This spirit produces a feeling of physical pain in the heart, fierce as from a blazing stove. As a result of this the sufferer does not fear God, despises the remembrance of punishment as of no consequence, disdains prayer, and during the very act itself regards the body almost as a dead corpse, as though it were an inanimate stone. He is like someone out of his mind and in a trance, perpetually drunk with desire for creatures, rational and irrational. And if the days of this spirit were not cut short, not a soul would be saved, clothed as it is in this clay, mingled with blood and foul moisture. How could they be? For everything created longs insatiably for what is akin to it—blood desires blood, the worm desires a worm, clay desires clay. And does not flesh too desire flesh? Yet we who bridle nature and desire the Kingdom try various tricks to deceive this deceiver. Blessed are they who have not experienced the conflict described above! Let us pray that we may always be delivered from such a trial, because those who slip into the pit we have mentioned fall

[1] Lit. 'clay'.
[2] I.e. Satan.
[3] Cf. St Matthew xix, 12.
[4] See Step26: 127.
[5] Psalm cxxvi, 1.

far below those ascending and descending by the ladder;[1] and to get out of that pit to the point of beginning to ascend they need much sweat and extreme abstinence.[2]

28. We ought to consider whether our spiritual enemies have not each their own proper task to fulfil when drawn up in battle array against us, just as in a visible war. Surprising to say, they certainly have. When I thought about those who were tempted, I observed that falls were of varying seriousness. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.[3]

29. The devil often has the habit, especially in warring against ascetics and those leading the solitary life, of using all his force, all his zeal, all his cunning, all his intrigue, all his ingenuity and purpose, to assail them by means of what is unnatural, and not by what is natural. Therefore, ascetics coming into contact with women, and not in any way tempted either by desire or thought, have sometimes regarded themselves as already blessed, not knowing, poor things, that where a worse downfall had been prepared for them, there was no need of the lesser one.

30. I think that our wretched murderers have the habit of besetting and seducing us poor creatures with sins contrary to nature for the following two reasons: that we may have everywhere plenty of opportunity to fall, and that we may receive greater punishment. What we have just said, was learnt by personal experience by him who had previously commanded asses and had afterwards been given over to wild asses and pitifully disgraced; and though he had previously been nourished with heavenly bread he was afterwards deprived of this blessing. And what is most astonishing is that even after his repentance, our founder Antony, grieving bitterly, said of him: 'A great pillar has fallen.' But that wise man hid the manner of the fall, for he knew that bodily fornication is possible without intercourse with another body. There is in us a kind of death; there is in us a devastating sin, which is ever borne about with us, but especially in youth. But I have not dared to write about it because my hand is restrained by him who said: the things which are done by them in secret, it is a shame even to speak of, or to write or to hear.[4]

31. This my beloved adversary (and yet not mine)—the flesh— was called death by Paul: Who, says he, will deliver me from this body of death?[5] And another theologian[6] calls it a passionate, slavish and nocturnal enemy. I used to long to know why it was given such names. If the flesh, as was said above, is death, who ever has conquered it undoubtedly does not die. But who is the man who will live and not see death[7] in the impurity of his flesh ?[8]

32. I ask you to consider this question: who is greater, he who dies and rises again or he who does not die at all? Those who extol the latter are deceived, for Christ both died and rose. But he who extols the former urges that for the dying, or rather the falling, there is no cause whatever for despair.

33. And our merciless foe, teacher of fornication, says that God is very merciful towards this passion as it is a natural one. But if we observe the guile of the demons we shall find that after sin has been committed they say that God is a just and inexorable Judge. They said the former in order to lead us into sin, and now the latter to drown us in despair.

34. As long as sorrow and despair are present, we do not so easily abandon ourselves to further sin. But when sorrow and despair are quenched, the tyrant speaks to us again of God's mercy.

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[1] That is, the ladder of angels seen by Jacob (Genesis xxviii, 12; St. John i, 51).

[2] Or, hunger, fasting.

[3] St. Matthew xi, 15.

[4] Ephesians v, 12.

[5] Romans vii, 24.

[6] I.e. St. Gregory Nazianzen.

[7] Psalm lxxxviii, 49.

[8] This might also be translated: 'of the impurity of his flesh?' The meaning would then be: 'who will live eternally and not see the death of the impurity of the flesh?'

35. The Lord, being incorruptible and incorporeal, rejoices in the purity and incorruptibility of our body. But nothing gives such joy to the demons, some say, as the stench of fornication, and no other passion so gladdens them as the defilement of the body.

36. Purity means that we put on the likeness of God, as far as is humanly possible.

37. The mother of sweetness is earth and dew, and the mother of purity is silence with obedience. Dispassion of the body attained by silence, has often been shaken on coming into contact with the world; but that obtained by obedience is genuine and inviolable everywhere.

38. I have seen pride lead to humility. And I remembered him who said: Who has known the mind of the Lord?[1] The pit and fruit of conceit is a fall; but a fall is often an occasion of humility for those who are willing to use it to their advantage.

39. He who wants to overcome the demon of fornication with gluttony and surfeiting is like a man who puts out a fire with oil.

40. He who attempts to stop this war by temperance, and by that alone, is like a man who has the idea of escaping the sea by swimming with one hand. Join humility to temperance, because without the former the latter is useless.

41. He who sees that some passion is getting the better of him, should first of all take up arms against this passion, and moreover against this passion alone, especially if it is the domestic foe; be cause until this passion is destroyed, we shall not derive any profit from the conquest of other passions. When we have killed this Egyptian,[2] we shall certainly see God in the bush of humility.

42. During temptation I have felt that this wolf was producing incomprehensible joy, tears and consolation in my soul, but I was really being deceived when I so childishly thought to have fruit from this and not harm.

43. Every other sin that a man may commit is outside the body, while he who commits impurity sins against his own body,[3] and this is certainly because the very substance of the flesh is defiled by pollution, which cannot happen in the other sins.

44. And I should like to ask: Why in the case of every other sin do we usually say that people have slipped, and simply that; but when we hear that someone has committed fornication, we say sorrowfully: So and so has fallen?

45. A fish swiftly escapes a hook; and a sensual soul shuns solitude.

46. When the devil wishes to tie two people to each other by a shameful bond, he works on the inclinations of both of them, and then lights the fire of passion.

47. Those who are inclined to sensuality often seem sympathetic, merciful, and prone to compunction; while those who care for chastity do not seem to have these qualities to the same extent.

48. A certain learned man put a serious question to me, saying: 'What is the gravest sin, apart from murder and denial of God?' And when I said: 'To fall into heresy,' he asked: 'Then why does the Catholic Church receive heretics who have sincerely anathematized their heresy, and consider them worthy to partake in the Mysteries; while on the other hand when a man who has committed fornication is received, even though he confesses and forsakes his sin, the Apostolic Constitutions order

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[1] Romans xi, 34.

[2] This refers to the story of Moses (Exodus ii, 11) and the burning bush (Exodus iii).

[3] 1 Corinthians vi, 18.

him to be excluded from the immaculate Mysteries for a number of years?' I was struck with bewilderment, and what perplexed me then has remained unsolved.[1]

49. In judging delights felt by us during psalmody, let us examine, ponder and observe what comes to us from the demon of fornication, and what comes from the words of the Spirit and from the grace and power contained in them.

50. Do not be ignorant of yourself, young man. I have seen men pray with all their soul for their loved ones, who in reality were moved by the spirit of fornication, while believing that they were fulfilling the law of love.

51. Touch alone is sufficient for bodily defilement, for nothing is so dangerous as this sense. Remember him who wrapped his hand in his cassock when about to carry his sick mother, and deaden your hand to natural or unnatural things, whether your own or another's body.

52. I think that one ought not to call anyone a saint in any real sense, until he has transformed this earth[2] into holiness, if such a transformation is even possible.

53. When we are lying in bed let us be especially sober and vigilant, because then our mind struggles with the demons without our body, and if it is sensual, it readily becomes a traitor.

54. Always let the remembrance of death and the Prayer of Jesus[3] said as a monologue go to sleep with you and get up with you; for you will find nothing to equal these aids during sleep.

55. Some think that battles and emissions during sleep come only from food. But I have observed that people who are seriously ill and the strictest fasters are very prone to these pollutions. I once asked one of the most experienced and distinguished monks about this, and the blessed man explained it to me very clearly. 'Emissions during sleep,' said that ever-memorable man, 'come from abundance of food and from a life of ease. They also come from contempt, when we pride ourselves that we have not been subject to these effluxes for a long time. And also they come from judging our neighbour. The last cases,' he added, 'can happen even to the sick.' But perhaps all three can. But if anyone is unable to find any of these reasons in himself, then he is indeed blessed to be so free from passion. And if this happens to him, then it comes solely from the envy of the demons, and God allows it for a time in order that, after a sinless mishap, he may obtain the most sublime humility.

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[1] Cf. P.G., 88; col. 912, Scholion 26: 'Heresy is a deviation of the mind from the truth and a sin of the mouth or tongue, whereas fornication is a sin of the whole body, which damages and depraves all the feelings and powers of body and soul, darkens the image and likeness of God in man, and is therefore called a fall. Heresy comes from presumption, while fornication comes from bodily comfort. Therefore heretics are corrected by humiliation, and sensualists by suffering.' We add the gist of a Greek note in K. A. Vretos's edition of the *Ladder* (Constantinople, 1883, p. 91): 'Obviously heresy is the greatest of sins. But since the passion of fornication has a tyrannical power due to pleasure and attracts attention, it often causes men to fall after repentance. Therefore, the fornicator is debarred for periods from the Holy Mysteries, that he may not return to his vomit and jeopardize his salvation. It also serves to put fear in all, and make them struggle against their passions and use the grace of the Holy Spirit. Heresy is a mental passion that springs from error and ignorance, or from ambition and vainglory. But when the evil is removed, it no longer causes conflict or trouble. Further, spiritual education aims at cutting out evil by the root. By the practice of a strict life, fornicators are trained to forget the pleasure of lust. For whereas the evil of heresy lies only in the mind, the passion of fornication also affects the body with corruption. The man who repents of heresy is at once cleansed by turning to God with his whole personality. But one who returns to God from fornication usually needs time and tears and fasting to get rid of the pleasure and heal the wound in his flesh and stabilize his mind. If, however, both remain unrepentant, they will certainly have the same condemnation.'

[2] I.e. his body.

[3] 2 See above, p.47, note 175.

56. Let no one get into the habit of thinking over during the day-time the phantasies that have occurred to him during sleep; for the aim of the demons in prompting this is to defile us while we are awake by making us think about our dreams.

57. Let us listen again to another wile of our foes. Just as food bad for the body produces sickness after a time or some days, so this often happens in the case of actions which defile the soul. I have seen some give way to luxury and not at once feel the attacks of the enemy. I have seen others eat with women and converse with them and at the time have no bad thoughts whatsoever in their mind. They were thus deceived and encouraged to grow careless and to think that they were in peace and safety, and they suddenly suffered destruction in their cells. But what bodily and spiritual destruction comes to us when we are alone? He who is tempted knows. And he who is not tempted does not need to know.

58. On these occasions[1] the best aids for us are: sackcloth, ashes, all-night standing, hunger, moistening the tongue in moderation when parched with thirst, dwelling amongst the tombs, and above all humility of heart; and if possible a spiritual father or a careful brother, an elder in spirit to help us. But I shall be surprised if anyone will be able to save his ship from the sea by himself.

59. One and the same sin often incurs a condemnation a hundred times greater for one person than for another, according to character, place, progress, and a good deal else.

60. Someone told me of an extraordinarily high degree of purity. He said: 'A certain man,[2] on seeing a beautiful body, thereupon glorified the Creator, and from that one look he was moved to the love of God and to a fountain of tears. And it was wonderful to see how what would have been a cause of destruction for one was for another the supernatural cause of a crown.' If such a person always feels and behaves in the same way on similar occasions, then he has risen immortal before the general resurrection.

61. Let us be guided by the same rule in singing melodies and songs. For lovers of God are moved to holy gaiety, to divine love and to tears both by worldly and by spiritual songs; but lovers of pleasure to the opposite.

62. As we have said before, some people in hermitages suffer far more severe attacks from the enemies. And no wonder! For the demons haunt such places, since the Lord in His care for our salvation has driven them into the deserts and the abyss (of hell). Demons of fornication cruelly assail the solitary in order to drive him back into the world, as having received no benefit from the desert. Demons keep away from us when we are living in the world, that we may go on staying among worldly-minded people because we are not attacked there. Hence we should realize that the place in which we are attacked is the one in which we are certainly waging bitter war on the enemy; for if we ourselves are not waging war, the enemy is presenting himself as our friend.[3]

63. When we are in the world for some justifiable reason, we are protected by the hand of God, perhaps through the prayer of our spiritual father, that the Lord may not be blasphemed through us.[4] And sometimes we are protected through our insensitivity and through having had long experience of the sights of the world and its subjects of conversation and all its doings. And sometimes it is because the demons go away of their own accord and leave us only the demon of conceit which takes the place of all the rest.

64. Hear yet another trick and villainy of that deceiver, all you who wish to be confirmed in purity, and look out for it. One who had experience of this craftiness told me that the demon of sensuality very often hid himself completely, and while a monk was sitting or conversing with women, he would suggest to him extreme piety, and perhaps even a fountain of tears, and would put into his mind the

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[1] At the time when the struggle in the blood rages' (St. Isaac the Syrian).

[2] St. Nonus, Bishop of Heliopolis; see Russian *Menologium* by St. Demetrius of Rostov, October 8th.

[3] Cf. Step 4: 109.

[4] Cf. 2 Kings xii, 34.

thought of instructing them on the remembrance of death, judgment, and chastity. Then the poor women, being deceived by his speech and false piety, would run to this wolf as to a shepherd, and when at last acquaintance ripened into familiarity, the unfortunate monk would suffer a fall.

65. Let us by every means in our power avoid either seeing or hearing of that fruit which we have vowed not to taste. For it is absurd to think ourselves stronger than the Prophet David—that is impossible.[1]

66. Purity is worthy of such great and high praise that certain of the Fathers ventured to call it freedom from passion.

67. Some say that those who have tasted sin cannot be called pure. In refutation of this view I would say: If anyone is willing, it is possible and easy to graft a good olive on to a wild olive. And if the keys of heaven had been entrusted to one who had always lived in a state of virginity, then perhaps the teaching of those who maintain what I have quoted above would be right. But let them be put to shame by him who had a mother-in-law, and having become pure, received the keys of the Kingdom.[2]

68. The snake of sensuality is many-faced. In those who are inexperienced in sin he sows the thought of making one trial and then stopping. But this crafty creature incites those who have tried this to fresh trial through the remembrance of their sin. Many inexperienced people feel no conflict in themselves simply because they do not know what is bad; and the experienced, because they know this abomination, suffer disquiet and struggle. But often the opposite of this also happens.

69. When we rise from sleep in a good and peaceful mood, we are being secretly encouraged by the holy angels, especially if we went to sleep with much prayer and watching. But sometimes we rise from sleep in a bad mood, and this is a result of evil dreams and visions.

70. I have seen the wicked highly exalted and towering aloft and foaming and raging in me like the cedars of Lebanon. And I passed by with temperance and lo, his fury was not as before, and I humbled my thought and sought him out, and his place could not be found in me—not a trace of it.[3]

71. He who has conquered his body has conquered nature; and he who has conquered nature has certainly risen above nature. And he who has done this is little (if at all) lower than the angels.[4]

72. It is not surprising for the immaterial to struggle with the immaterial. But it is truly surprising for one inhabiting matter, and in conflict with this hostile and crafty matter, to put to flight immaterial foes.

73. The good Lord shows His great care for us in that the shamelessness of the feminine sex is checked by shyness as with a sort of bit. For if the woman were to run after the man, no flesh would be saved.

74. In the rulings made by the Fathers a distinction is drawn between different things, such as attraction, or intercourse, or consent, or captivity, or struggle, or so-called passion in the soul. And these blessed men define attraction as a simple conception, or an image of something encountered for the first time which has lodged in the heart. Intercourse is conversation with what has presented itself, accompanied by passion or dispassion. And consent is the bending of the soul to what has been presented to it, accompanied by delight. But captivity is a forcible and invo1untary rape of the heart or a permanent association with what has been encountered which destroys the good order of our condition. Struggle, according to their definition, is power equal to the attacking force, which is either victorious or else suffers defeat according to the soul's desire. And they define passion in a special sense as that which lurks disquietingly in the soul for a long time, and through its intimacy with the soul brings it finally to what amounts to a habit, a self-incurred downright desertion. Of all these states

[1] Cf. 2 Kings xi.
[2] Cf. St. Luke iv, 38; St. Matthew xvi, 19.
[3] Psalm xxxvi, 35—6.
[4] Psalm viii, 6.

the first is without sin, the second not always, but the third is sinful or sinless according to the state of the contestant. Struggle is the occasion of crowns or punishments. Captivity is judged differently, according to whether it occurs at the time of prayer, or at other times; it is judged one way in matters of little importance, and in another way in the case of evil thoughts. But passion is unequivocally condemned in every case, and demands either corresponding repentance or future correction. Therefore he who regards the first attraction dispassionately cuts off at a single blow all the rest which follow.

75. Amongst the more precise and discerning Fathers there is mention of a still more subtle notion, something which some of them call a flick of the mind.[1] This is its characteristic: without passage of time, without word or image, it instantaneously introduces the passion to the victim. There is nothing swifter than this in the material world or more indiscernible in the spiritual. It manifests itself in the soul by a simple remembrance with which the soul has no time to dally, since it is independent of time, unconnected with any image, impervious to analysis, and in some cases even unknown to the person himself. If anyone, therefore, with the help of mourning has been able to detect such a subtlety, he can explain to us how it is possible for a soul, by the eye alone, by a mere glance, or the touch of the hand, or the hearing of a song, without any notion or thought, to commit a definite sin of impurity.

76. Some say that it is from thoughts of fornication that passions invade the body. But some affirm on the contrary that it is from the feeling of the body that evil thoughts are born. The former say that if the mind had not gone before, the body would not have followed after. And the latter adduce the malice of bodily passion in justification of their view, saying that often bad thoughts manage to enter into the heart as the result of a pleasant sight, or the touch of a hand, or the smell of perfume, or hearing sweet voices. If anyone can do so in the Lord, let him explain this; for knowledge of this sort is extremely necessary and profitable for those living the active life scientifically. But for those practising virtue in simplicity of heart, this is not of the least importance. For not all have knowledge; but neither have all the blessed simplicity which is the breastplate against the wiles of evil spirits.

77. Some passions pass to the body from the soul, and some do the opposite. The latter happens to people living in the world, but the former to those living the monastic life, because of the lack of outward stimulus. But about this I will only say: Thou shalt seek wisdom among evil men and shalt not find it.[2]

78. When we have struggled much with this demon, partner of filth, and driven it out of our heart, torturing it with the stone of fasting and the sword of humility, then this wretch like some kind of worm hides itself in our body and endeavours to defile us, tickling us into senseless and untimely movements.

79. It is those who are subject to the demon of arrogance who especially suffer in this way; because, as their hearts are no longer continually occupied with impure thoughts, they are prone to the passion of pride. And in order to be convinced of the truth of what has been said, when they have achieved a certain measure of holy quiet, let them discreetly examine themselves. Then they will certainly find that some thought is concealed in the depth of their heart like a snake in dung, suggesting to them that they have made some progress in purity of heart by their own effort and zeal. Poor wretches! They do not think of what was said: 'What hast thou that thou didst not receive[3] as a free gift, either from God, or by the co-operation and prayers of others?' And so let them look to their own affairs, and let them cast out of their heart with all speed the snake mentioned above, killing it by much humility, so that when they have got rid of it they may in time be stripped of their clothing of skin[4] and as chaste children sing

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[1] Cf. Step 27: 45. The 'discerning father' appears to be St. Mark the Ascetic in his *Admonition to Nicholas* (PG. 65 col. 1036 B).

[2] Proverbs xiv, 6.

[3] 1 Corinthians iv, 7.

[4] I.e. carnal movements and impure desires (cf. Genesis iii, 21).

to the Lord the triumph song of purity; if only, when they are stripped, they do not find themselves naked of that humility and freedom from malice which is natural to children.

80. This demon much more than any other watches for critical moments. And when we are physically unable to pray against it, then the unholy creature launches a special attack against us.

81. Those who have not yet obtained true prayer of the heart, can find help in violence in bodily prayer—I mean stretching out the hands, beating the breast, sincere raising of the eyes to heaven, deep sighing, frequent prostrations. But often they cannot do this owing to the presence of other people, and so the demons especially choose to attack them just at this very time. And as we have not yet the strength to resist them by firmness of mind and the invisible power of prayer, we yield to our enemies. If possible, go apart for a brief space. Hide for a while in some secret place. Raise on high the eyes of your soul, if you can; but if not, your bodily eyes. Hold your arms motionless in the form of a cross, in order to shame and conquer your Amalek[1] by this sign. Cry to Him who is mighty to save, using no subtle expressions but humble speech, preferably making this your prelude: Have mercy on me, for I am weak.[2] Then you will know by experience the power of the Most High, and with invisible help you will invisibly drive away the invisible ones. He who accustoms himself to wage war in this way will soon be able to put his enemies to flight solely by spiritual means; for the latter is a recompense from God to doers of the former; and rightly.

82. In a gathering where I was, I noticed that an earnest brother was troubled by evil thoughts. As he could not find a suitable place for secret prayer, he went out as if compelled by natural necessity to the place set apart for that purpose, and there armed himself with vigorous prayer against the enemy. When I reproached him for choosing an indecent place, he replied: 'In an unclean place I prayed to drive away unclean thoughts in order to be cleansed of all impurity.'

83. All demons try to darken our mind, and then they suggest what they want to. For as long as the mind does not shut its eyes, we shall not be robbed of our treasure. But the demon of fornication tries to do this much more than all the rest. Often, after darkening our mind which controls us, it urges and disposes us in the presence of people to do what only those who are out of their mind do. Then later when the mind becomes sober we are ashamed of our unholy acts, words and gestures not only before those who saw us but also before ourselves, and we are amazed at our previous blindness. Often as a result of such reflection, men have desisted from this evil.

84. Banish the enemy when he hinders you from prayer, meditation, or vigil after you have committed sin. Remember Him who said: Yet because the soul tormented by the thought of previous sins gives me trouble, I will give her relief from her enemies.[3]

85. Who has conquered his body? He who has crushed his heart. And who has crushed his heart? He who has denied himself. For how can he not be crushed who has died to his own will?

86. There is a passionate person more passionate than the passionate, and he will even confess his pollutions with pleasure and enjoyment. Unclean and shameful thoughts in the heart are generally produced by the deceiver of the heart, the demon of fornication. But temperance and disregard of them is the cure.

87. But I do not know by what habit and rule of life I can bind this friend of mine and judge him by the example of the other passions. For before I can bind him he is let loose; before I can condemn him I am reconciled to him; before I can punish him I bend down and pity him. How can I hate him whom by nature I habitually love? How can I get free of him with whom I am bound forever? How can I escape what will share my resurrection? How am I to make immortal what has received a mortal nature? What argument can I use to one who has the argument of nature on his side?

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[1] I.e. the unclean spirit.

[2] Psalm vi, 3.

[3] Cf. St. Luke xviii, 5.

88. If I bind him by fasting, by condemning my neighbour I am handed over to him again. If, desisting from judgment, I overmaster him, then being proud of this, I am subjected to him again. For he is an ally and a foe, an assistant and a rival, a defender and a traitor. If I humour him he attacks me. If I exhaust him he gets feeble. When he is rested, he misbehaves himself. If I turn away in loathing, he cannot bear it. If I mortify him, I endanger myself. If I strike him down, I have nothing with which to obtain virtues. I embrace him and I turn away from him.

89. What is this mystery in me? What is the meaning of this blending of body and soul? How am I constituted a friend and foe to myself? Tell me, tell me, my yoke-fellow, my nature, for I shall not ask anyone else in order to learn about you. How am I to remain unwounded by you? How can I avoid the danger of my nature? For I have already made a vow to Christ to wage war against you. How am I to overcome your tyranny? For I am resolved to be your master.

90. And the flesh might say in reply to its soul: 'I shall never tell you anything which you do not know equally well, but only of things of which we both have knowledge. I have my father[1] within me—self-love. The fire which I experience from without comes from humouring me and from general comfort. The fire which burns within comes from past ease and bygone deeds. Having conceived, I give birth to sins, and they, when born, in turn beget death or despair. If you know the deep and obvious weakness which is in both you and me, you have bound my hands. If you starve your appetite, you have bound my feet from going further. If you take the yoke of obedience, you have thrown off my yoke. If you obtain humility, you have cut off my head.'

This is the fifteenth reward of victory. He who has received it while still living in the flesh has died and risen, and from now on experiences the foretaste of future immortality.

STEP 16

On love of money or avarice.

1. Many learned teachers treat next, after the tyrant just described, the thousand-headed demon of avarice. We, unlearned as we are, did not wish to change the order of the learned, and we have therefore followed the same convention and rule. So let us first say a little about the disease, and then speak briefly about the remedy.

2. Avarice, or love of money, is the worship of idols,[2] a daughter of unbelief, an excuse for infirmities, a foreboder of old age, a harbinger of drought, a herald of hunger.

3. The lover of money sneers at the Gospel and is a wilful transgressor. He who has attained to love scatters his money. But he who says that he lives for love and for money has deceived himself.

4. He who mourns for himself has also renounced his body; and at the appropriate time he does not spare it.

5. Do not say that you are collecting money for the poor; with two mites the Kingdom was purchased.[3]

6. A hospitable man and a money-lover met one another, and the latter called the former unintelligible.

7. He who has conquered this passion has cut out care; but he who is bound by it never attains to pure prayer.

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[1] Some Greek versions read 'mother'.

[2] Cf. Ephesians v, 5.

[3] St. Luke xxi, 2.

8. The beginning of love of money is the pretext of almsgiving, and the end of it is hatred of the poor. So long as he is collecting he is charitable, but when the money is in hand he tightens his hold.

9. I have seen how men of scanty means enriched themselves by living with the poor in spirit, and forgot their first poverty.[1]

10. A monk who loves money is a stranger to idleness[2] and hourly remembers the word of the Apostle: Let an idle man not eat,[3] and: These hands of mine have ministered to me and to those who were with me.[4]

This is the sixteenth struggle. He who has won this victory has either obtained love or cut out care.

Step 17

On poverty (that hastens heavenwards).[5]

1. Poverty is the resignation of cares, life without anxiety, an unencumbered traveller, alienation from sorrow, fidelity to the commandments.

2. A poor monk is lord of the world. He has entrusted his cares to God and by faith has obtained all men as his slaves. He will not tell his need to man, and he receives what comes to him, as from the hand of the Lord.

3. The poor ascetic is a son of detachment and thinks of what he has as if it were nothing. When he becomes a solitary, he regards everything as refuse. But if he worries about something, he has not yet become poor.

4. A poor man is pure during prayer, but an acquisitive man prays to material images.

5. Those who live in obedience are strangers to love of money. For where even the body has been given up, what is left to be one's own? Only in one way can they do wrong, namely by being ready and quick to go from place to place. I have seen material possessions make monks patient to remain in one place. But I praise those who are pilgrims for the Lord.

6. He who has tasted the things on high easily despises what is below. But he who has not tasted the things above finds joy in possessions.

7. A man who impoverishes himself for no reason suffers a double harm: he abstains from present goods and is deprived of future ones.

8. Let us monks, then, be as trustful as the birds are; for they do not have cares, and they do not collect.

9. Great is he who piously renounces possessions, but holy is he who renounces his will. The one will receive a hundredfold, either in money or in graces, but the other will inherit eternal life.

10. Waves never leave the sea, nor do anger and grief leave the avaricious.

11. He who despises what is material, is rid of quarrels and controversies; but the covetous man will fight till death for a needle.

12. Unwavering faith cuts off cares, and remembrance of death denies the body as well.

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[1] Cf. St. Matthew v, 3.
[2] 'Accidie'. Cf. Step 13: note 187, p. 52.
[3] 2 Thessalonians iii, 10.
[4] Acts xx, 34.
[5] The words in parenthesis are so printed in P.G. 88.

13. In Job there was no trace of avarice; therefore, when he lost everything, he remained undisturbed.

14. The love of money is (and is called) the root of all evils,[1] because it produces hatred, thefts, envy, separations, enmities, storms, remembrance of wrong, hard-heartedness, murders.

15. Some have burned much wood with a small fire; and with the help of one virtue some have escaped all the passions just mentioned. This virtue is called detachment, and it is born of experience and a taste of God and meditation on the account to be given at death.

16. The attentive reader will remember the history of the mother of all evil. When she enumerated her wicked and cursed children she said that her second offspring was the stone of insensibility. But the many-headed snake of idolatry prevented me from giving it its own special place. I do not know why, but the discerning Fathers gave it the third place in the chain of the eight deadly sins. Having said sufficient about avarice, we now intend to speak about insensibility, as the third infirmity (though the second born). And after this, we shall treat briefly of sleep and watchfulness, and also of puerile and cowardly fear; for these are the failings of beginners.

This is the seventeenth step. He who has mounted it is journeying to Heaven stripped of material things.

Step 18

On insensibility, that is, deadening of the soul and the death of the mind before the death of the body.

1. Insensibility both in the body and in the spirit is deadened feeling, which from long sickness and negligence lapses into loss of feeling.

2. Insensibility is negligence that has become habit; benumbed thought; the birth of presumption; a snare for zeal; the noose of courage; ignorance of compunction; a door to despair; the mother of forgetfulness, which gives birth to loss of the fear of God. And then she becomes the daughter of her own daughter.[2]

3. He who has lost sensibility is a brainless philosopher, a self-condemned commentator, a self-contradictory windbag, a blind man who teaches others to see. He talks about healing a wound, and does not stop irritating it. He complains of sickness, and does not stop eating what is harmful. He prays against it, and immediately goes and does it. And when he has done it, he is angry with himself; and the wretched man is not ashamed of his own words. 'I am doing wrong,' he cries, and eagerly continues to do so. His mouth prays against his passion, and his body struggles for it. He philosophises about death, but he behaves as if he were immortal. He groans over the separation of soul and body, but drowses along as if he were eternal. He talks of temperance and self-control, but he lives for gluttony. He reads about the judgment and begins to smile. He reads about vainglory, and is vainglorious while actually reading. He repeats what he has learnt about vigil, and drops asleep on the spot. He praises prayer, but runs from it as from the plague. He blesses obedience, but he is the first to disobey. He praises detachment, but he is not ashamed to be spiteful and to fight for a rag. When angered he gets bitter, and he is angered again at his bitterness; and he does not feel that after one defeat he is suffering another. Having overeaten he repents, and a little later again gives way to it. He blesses silence, and praises it with a spate of words. He teaches meekness, and during the actual teaching frequently gets angry. Having woken from passion he sighs, and shaking his head, he again yields to passion. He condemns laughter, and lectures on mourning with a smile on his face. Before others he blames himself for being vainglorious, and in blaming himself is only angling for glory for

[1] 1 Timothy vi, 10.

[2] Loss of the fear of God is the daughter of forgetfulness, which is the daughter of insensibility. Then loss of the fear of God in turn gives birth to insensibility.

himself. He looks people in the face with passion, and talks about chastity. While frequenting the world, he praises the solitary life, without realizing that he shames himself. He extols almsgivers, and reviles beggars. All the time he is his own accuser, and he does not want to come to his senses—I will not say cannot.

4. I have seen many people like this hear about death and the terrible judgment and shed tears, and with the tears still in their eyes they eagerly go to a meal. And I was amazed how this tyrant, this stinkpot of gluttony, by complete indifference, can grow so strong as to turn the tables even on mourning.

5. As far as my poor powers and knowledge allow, I have exposed the wiles and weals of this stony, obstinate, raging and stupid passion. I have not the patience to expatiate on it. He who is experienced and able in the Lord should not shrink from applying healing to the sores. For I am not ashamed to admit my own powerlessness, since I am sorely afflicted with this sickness. I should not have been able to discover its wiles and tricks by myself if I had not caught it and held it firmly, probing it to make it acknowledge what has been said above, and plying it with the scourge of the fear of the Lord and with unceasing prayer. That is why this tyrant and evil doer said to me: 'My subjects laugh when they see corpses. When they stand at prayer they are completely stony, hard and darkened. When they see the holy altar they feel nothing; when they partake of the Gift, it is as if they had eaten ordinary bread. When I see persons moved by compunction, I mock them. From my father I learnt to kill all good things which are born of courage and love. I am the mother of laughter, the nurse of sleep, the friend of a full belly. When exposed I do not grieve. I go hand in hand with sham piety.[1]

6. I was astounded at the words of this raving creature and asked her about her father, wishing to know her name, and she said; 'I have no single parentage; my conception is mixed and indefinite. Satiety nourishes me, time makes me grow, and bad habit entrenches me. He who keeps this habit will never be rid of me. Be constant in vigil, meditating on the eternal judgment; then perhaps I shall to some extent relax my hold on you. Find out what caused me to be born in you, and then battle against my mother; for she is not in all cases the same. Pray often at the coffins, and engrave an indelible image of them in your heart. For unless you inscribe it there with the pencil of fasting, you will never conquer me.'

Step 19

On sleep, prayer, and psalm-singing in chapel.

1. Sleep is a particular state of nature, an image of death, inactivity of the senses. Sleep is one, but, like desire, its sources and occasions are many: that is to say, it comes from nature, from food, from demons, or perhaps, sometimes, from extreme and prolonged fasting, through which the flesh is weakened and at last longs for the consolation of sleep.

2. Just as prolonged drinking is a matter of habit, so too from habit comes too much sleeping. Therefore we must struggle with the question of sleep, especially in the easy days of obedience, because a long-standing habit is difficult to cure.

3. Let us observe and we shall find that the spiritual trumpet[2] serves as an outward signal for the gathering of the brethren, but it is also the unseen signal for the assembly of our foes. So some of them stand by our bed and when we get up urge us to lie down again: 'Wait,' they say, 'till the preliminary hymns are finished; then you can go to church.' Others plunge those standing at prayer into sleep. Some produce severe, unusual pains in the stomach. Others egg us on to make conversation in church.

[1] Some manuscripts reverse these last two sentences.
[2] I.e. the gong or bell, often of wood; horns and drums of various kinds were also used.

Some entice the mind to shameful thoughts. Others make us lean against the wall as though from fatigue. Sometimes they involve us in fits of yawning. Some of them bring on waves of laughter during prayer, thereby desiring to stir up the anger of God against us. Some force us to hurry the reading or singing—merely from laziness; others suggest that we should sing more slowly for the pleasure of it; and sometimes they sit at our mouths and shut them, so that we can scarcely open them. He who realizes that he is standing before God will be as still as a pillar during prayer and will pray with heart-felt feeling; and none of the aforesaid demons will make sport of him.

4. The really obedient man often suddenly becomes radiant and exultant during prayer; for this wrestler was prepared and fired beforehand by his sincere service.

5. It is possible for all to pray with a congregation; for many it is beneficial to pray with a single kindred spirit; solitary prayer is for the very few.

6. In singing with many it is impossible to pray with the wordless prayer of the spirit. But your mind should be engaged in contemplation of the words being chanted or read, or you should say some definite prayer while you are waiting for the alternate verse to be chanted.

7. It is not proper for anyone to engage in any accessory work, or rather distraction, during the time of prayer. For the angel who attended Antony the Great taught him this clearly.

8. Just as a furnace tests gold, so the practice of prayer tests the monk's zeal and love for God.

A praiseworthy work—he who makes it his own draws near to God and expels demons.

Step 20

On bodily vigil and how to use it to attain spiritual vigil and how to practise it.

1. Some stand before earthly kings without weapons and without armour, others hold staffs of office, and some have shields, and some swords. The former are vastly superior to the latter, for they are usually personal relations of the king and members of the royal household. So it is with earthly kings.

2. Now let us see how we stand before God our King, when we stand at our prayers in the evening, or during the day and night. For some at their evening all-night vigil lift up their hands in prayer as if they were incorporeal and stripped of all care. Others stand at that time singing psalms. Others are more occupied in reading. And some out of weakness courageously resist sleep by working with their hands. Others try to feel the horror of the thought of death, hoping thus to obtain contrition. And of all these, the first and last are in all-night vigil for the love of God; the second do what befits a monk; while the third go the lowest way. Yet God accepts and values the offerings of each according to their intention and power.

3. A vigilant eye makes the mind pure; but much sleep binds the soul.

4. A vigilant monk is a foe to fornication but a sleepy one mates with it.

5. Vigil is a quenching of lust, deliverance from dream phantoms, a tearful eye, a softened heart, the guarding of thoughts, the dissolving of food, the subduing of passions, the taming of spirits, the bridling of the tongue, the banishment of phantasies.

6. A monk who denies himself sleep is a fisher of thoughts, and in the stillness of the night he can easily observe and catch them.

7. The God-loving monk, when the bell rings for prayer, says: 'Good, good!' The lazy one says: 'What a nuisance!'

8. The preparing of the table exposes gluttons, but the work of prayer exposes lovers of God. The former dance on seeing the table, but the latter scowl.

9. Long sleep produces forgetfulness, but vigil purifies the memory.

10. The farmer’s wealth is gathered on the threshing floor and in the wine-press, but the wealth and knowledge of monks is gathered during the evenings and the night hours while standing at prayer and engaged in spiritual activity.

11. Long sleep is an unjust comrade; it robs the lazy of half their life, and even more.

12. The inexperienced monk is wide awake in friendly conversation; but his eyes become heavy when the hour of prayer is upon him.

13. The lazy monk is famous and skilled at talking; but when reading is about to begin, he cannot keep his eyes open. At the sound of the trumpet the dead will rise, and when idle talk is afoot those who were asleep come to themselves.

14. The tyrant sleep is a crafty friend; when we are full of food it often leaves us; but in hunger and thirst it attacks us vigorously.

15. It suggests that we should do handwork during our prayers; for it cannot otherwise foil the prayers of the vigilant.

16. It first enters into conflict with beginners in order to make them negligent from the very outset or to prepare the way for the demon of fornication.

17. Not until we are freed from this should we beg to be excused common worship, for often shame keeps us from dozing. The hound is the enemy of the hares, and the demon of vainglory is the enemy of sleep.

18. When the day is over, the vendor sits down and counts his profits, but the ascetic does so when the psalm-singing is over.

19. When prayer is finished wait soberly, and you will see that swarms of demons, as if challenged by us, try to invade us after prayer with absurd phantasies. Sit and watch; you will see those who are in the habit of snatching away the first fruits of the soul.

20. It may happen that continuous meditation on passages of the Psalms is prolonged into the hour of sleep. And it may happen that the demons put these passages into our mind in order to lead us to pride. I would not have mentioned the third case, had not someone forced me to do so. The soul which has spent all day unceasingly engaged with the word of the Lord will love to be occupied with it in sleep too. For this second grace is in a special sense a reward for the first and helps us to avoid falls and phantasies.

This is the twentieth step. He who has mounted it has received light in his heart.

Step 21

On unmanly and puerile cowardice.

1. If you pursue virtue in a monastery or community, you are not likely to be attacked much by fear. But the man who spends his time in more solitary places should make every effort to avoid being overcome by that offspring of vainglory, that daughter of unbelief, cowardice.

2. Cowardice is a childish disposition in an old, vainglorious soul. Cowardice is a falling away from faith that comes of expecting the unexpected.

3. Fear is a rehearsing of danger beforehand; or again, fear is a trembling sensation of the heart, alarmed and troubled by unknown misfortunes. Fear is a loss of conviction.

4. A proud soul is a slave of cowardice; it vainly trusts in itself, and is afraid of any sound or shadow of creatures.

5. Those who mourn over their sins but are insensible to every other sorrow do not feel cowardice, but the cowardly often have mental breakdowns. And this is natural. For the Lord rightly forsakes the proud[1] that the rest of us may learn not to be puffed up.

6. Although all cowardly people are vainglorious, yet not all who are unafraid are humble, since even robbers and grave-plunderers may be without fear.

7. Do not hesitate to go late at night to those places where you usually feel afraid. But if you yield only a little to such weakness, then this childish and ridiculous infirmity will grow old with you. As you go on your way, arm yourself with prayer. When you reach the place, stretch out your hands. Flog your enemies with the name of Jesus, for there is no stronger weapon in heaven or earth. When you get rid of the disease (of fear), praise Him who has delivered you. If you continue to be thankful, He will protect you for ever.

8. Just as it is impossible to satisfy the stomach in one bout, so also it is impossible to overcome fear instantly. It will yield more quickly in proportion as you mourn; but to the extent that our mourning fails, we continue to be cowards.

9. My hair and my flesh shuddered[2] said Eliphaz, when describing the malice of the demon. Sometimes the soul, and sometimes the flesh, turns coward first, and the one passes its infirmity on to the other. If this untimely fear does not pass into the soul when the flesh flinches, then deliverance from the disease is at hand. But the actual freedom from cowardice comes when we eagerly accept all unexpected events with a contrite heart.

10. It is not darkness and loneliness of place that gives the demons power against us, but barrenness of soul. And through God's providence this sometimes happens in order that we may learn by it.

11. He who has become the servant of the Lord will fear his Master alone, but he who does not yet fear Him is often afraid of his own shadow.

12. In the presence of an invisible spirit the body becomes afraid; but in the presence of an angel the soul of the humble is filled with joy. Therefore, when we recognize the presence from the effect, let us quickly hasten to prayer, for our good guardian has come to pray with us.

He who has conquered cowardice has clearly dedicated his life and soul to God.

Step 22

On the many forms of vainglory.

1. Some like to distinguish vainglory from pride and to give it a special place and chapter. And so they say that there are eight capital and deadly sins[3]. But Gregory the Theologian and other teachers have given out that there are seven; and I am strongly inclined to agree with them. For who that has conquered vainglory has pride within him? The only difference between them is such as there is between a child and a man, between wheat and bread; for the one is the beginning and the other the end. And so now that the occasion calls for it let us speak briefly about the beginning and sum of the

[1] Cf. St. Matthew xxvii, 46.

[2] Job iv, 15.

[3] Lit. 'thoughts of evil'.

passions, unholy self-esteem. For if anyone were to try to philosophize at length on this subject he would be like someone who fusses over the weight of the winds.

2. With regard to its form, vainglory is a change of nature, a perversion of character, a note of blame. And with regard to its quality, it is a dissipation of labours, a waste of sweat, a betrayal of treasure, a child of unbelief, the precursor of pride, shipwreck in harbour, an ant on the threshing-floor which, though small, has designs upon all one's labour and fruit. The ant waits for the gathering of the wheat, and vainglory for the gathering of the riches of virtue; for the one loves to steal and the other to squander.

3. The spirit of despair rejoices at the sight of increasing vice, and the spirit of vainglory at the sight of increasing virtue. The door of the first is a multitude of wounds, and the door of the second is a wealth of labours.

4. Observe and you will find unholy vainglory abounding till the very grave in clothes, oils, servants, perfumes and the like.

5. The sun shines on all alike, and vainglory beams on all activities. For instance, I am vainglorious when I fast, and when I relax the fast in order to be unnoticed I am again vainglorious over my prudence. When well-dressed I am quite overcome by vainglory, and when I put on poor clothes I am vainglorious again. When I talk I am defeated, and when I am silent I am again defeated by it. However I throw this prickly-pear, a spike stands upright.

6. A vainglorious person is a believing idolater; he apparently honours God, but he wants to please not God but men.

7. Every lover of self-display is vainglorious. The fast of the vainglorious person is without reward and his prayer is futile, because he does both for the praise of men.

8. A vainglorious ascetic is cheated both ways: he exhausts his body, and he gets no reward.

9. Who will not laugh at the vainglorious worker, standing for psalmody and moved by this passion now to laughter and then to tears for all to see?

10. God often hides from our eyes even those perfections that we have obtained. But he who praises us or, rather, misleads us, opens our eyes by his praise, and as soon as our eyes are opened, our treasure vanishes.

11. The flatterer is a servant of devils, a guide to pride, a destroyer of contrition, a ruiner of virtues, a misleader. Those who honour you deceive you, says the prophet.[1]

12. People of high spirit bear offence nobly and gladly, but only holy people and saints can pass through praise without harm.

13. I have seen people mourning who, on being praised, flared up in anger; and as at a public gathering one passion gave place to another.

14. Who among men knows the thoughts of a man, except the spirit of the man within him?[2] And so let those who try to praise us to our face be silent and ashamed.

15. When you hear that your neighbour or friend has abused you behind your back or even to your face, then show love and praise him.

16. It is a great work to shake from the soul the praise of men, but to reject the praise of demons is greater.

[1] Isaiah iii, 12.

[2] 1 Corinthians ii, 11.

17. It is not he who depreciates himself who shows humility (for who will not put up with himself?) but he who maintains the same love for the very man who reproaches him.

18. I have noticed the demon of vainglory suggesting thoughts to one brother, while he reveals them to another, and he incites the latter to tell the former what is in his heart, and then praises him as a thought reader. And sometimes, unholy creature that he is, he even touches the bodily members and produces palpitations.

19. Do not take any notice of him when he suggests that you should accept a bishopric, or abbacy, or doctorate; for it is difficult to drive away a dog from a butcher's counter.

20. Whenever he sees that any have acquired in some slight measure a contemplative attitude, he immediately urges them to leave the desert for the world, saying: 'Go away in order to save the souls which are perishing.'

21. Ethiopians have one kind of face, and statues another; so too the vainglory of those living in a community takes a different form from that of those living in a desert.

22. Vainglory incites monks given to levity to anticipate the arrival of lay guests and to go out of the cloister to meet them. It makes them fall at their feet and, though full of pride, it feigns humility. It checks manner and voice, and keeps an eye on the hands of visitors in order to receive something from them. It calls them lords and patrons, graced with godly life. To those sitting at table it suggests abstinence, and it rebukes subordinates mercilessly. It stirs those who are slack at standing in psalmody to make an effort; those who have no voice become good singers and the sleepy wake up. It flatters the conductor, and begs to be given first place in the choir; it calls him father and master as long as the guests are still there.

23. Vainglory makes those who are preferred, proud, and those who are slighted, resentful.

24. Vainglory is often the cause of dishonour instead of honour, because it brings great shame to its enraged disciples.

25. Vainglory makes quick-tempered people meek before men.

26. It has great ambition for natural gifts, and through them often hurls its wretched slaves to destruction.

27. I have seen a demon injure and chase off his own brother. For just when a brother had lost his temper, secular visitors suddenly arrived; and the wretched fellow resold himself to vain-glory. He could not serve two passions at the same time.

28. He who has sold himself to vainglory leads a double life. Outwardly he lives with monks, but in mind and thought he is in the world.

29. If we ardently desire to please the Heavenly King, we should be eager to taste the glory that is above. He who has tasted that will despise all earthly glory. For I should be surprised if anyone could despise the latter unless he had tasted the former.

30. Often after being stripped by vainglory, we turn and strip it more cleverly. I have seen some who began spiritual activity out of vainglory, and although they made a bad start, yet the end proved praiseworthy, because they changed their intention.

31. He who is proud of his natural advantages,[1] I mean cleverness, ability to learn, skill in reading, a clear pronunciation, quick understanding and all such gifts received by us without labour, will never

[1] There are inclinations which are considered virtues, yet are not, but are really gifts and advantages of nature. Many people are naturally meek, gentle, sober, courageous, modest, chaste, or silent. It is no virtue to be naturally a small eater; but it is a virtue to abstain voluntarily and by choice.

obtain the supernatural blessings, because he who is unfaithful in a little is also unfaithful and vainglorious in much.[1]

32. For the sake of extreme dispassion, rich gifts, miracle-working and prophetic powers, many exhaust their bodies in vain. They do not know, poor wretches, that it is not toil so much as humility that is the mother of such perfections.

33. He who asks God for gifts in return for his labours has laid unsure foundations. He who regards himself as a debtor will unexpectedly and suddenly receive riches.

34. Do not believe the winnower when he suggests that you should display your virtues for the benefit of the hearers. For what shall a man be profited if he shall bring profit to the whole world, and forfeit his soul?[2] Nothing so edifies our neighbour as sincere and humble speech and manners; for this serves as a spur to others never to be puffed-up. And what can be more beneficial than this?

35. One who had the gift of sight told me what he had seen. 'Once,' he said, 'when I was sitting in assembly, the demon of vainglory and the demon of pride came and sat beside me, one on either side. The one poked me in the side with the finger of vain-glory and urged me to relate some vision or labour which I had done in the desert. But as soon as I had shaken him off, saying: Let them be turned back and put to shame who plot evil against me,[3] then the demon on my left at once said in my ear: Well done, well done, you have become great by conquering my shameless mother. Turning to him, I made apt use of the rest of the verse and said: Let them be turned back and put to shame who said to me: Well done, well done.[4] And to my question: How is vainglory the mother of pride? he replied: Praises exalt and puff one up; and when the soul is exalted, then pride seizes it, lifts it up to heaven and casts it down to the abyss.'

36. There is a glory that comes from the Lord, for He says: Those who glorify Me, I will glorify.[5] And there is a glory that dogs us through diabolic intrigue, for it is said: Woe, when all men shall speak well of you.[6] You may be sure that it is the first kind of glory when you regard it as harmful and avoid it in every possible way, and hide your manner of life wherever you go. But the other you will know when you do something, however trifling, hoping that you will be observed by men.[7]

37. Abominable vainglory suggests that we should pretend to have some virtue that we do not possess, spurring us on by the text: Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works.[8]

38. The Lord often brings the vainglorious to a state of humility through the dishonour that befalls them.

39. The beginning of the conquest of vainglory is the custody of the mouth and love of being dishonoured; the middle stage is a beating back of all known acts of vainglory; and the end (if there is an end to an abyss) consists in trying to behave in the presence of others so that we are humbled without feeling it.

40. Do not hide your sins with the idea of removing a cause of stumbling from your neighbour; although perhaps it will not be advisable to use this remedy in every case, but it will depend on the nature of one's sins.

[1] St. Luke xvi, 10.
[2] St. Matthew xvi, 26; St. Luke ix, 25.
[3] Psalm xxxix, 15.
[4] Psalm lxix, 3. Cf. xxxix, 16.
[5] 1 Kings ii, 30.
[6] St. Luke vi, 26.
[7] St. Matthew vi, 1.
[8] St. Matthew v, 16.

41. When we invite glory, or when it comes to us from others uninvited, or when out of vainglory we decide upon a certain course of action, we should remember our mourning and should think of the holy fear with which we stood before God in solitary prayer; and in this way we shall certainly put shameless vainglory out of countenance—if we are really concerned to attain true prayer. If this is insufficient, then let us briefly recollect our death. And if this is also ineffective, at least let us fear the shame that follows honour. For he who exalts himself will be humbled[1] not only there, but certainly here as well.

42. When our praisers, or rather our seducers, begin to praise us, let us briefly call to mind the multitude of our sins, and we shall find ourselves unworthy of what is said or done in our honour.

43. No doubt there are certain prayers of some vainglorious people that deserve to be heard by God; but the Lord has a habit of anticipating their prayers and petitions so that their conceit should not be increased because their prayers have succeeded.

44. Simpler people are not much infected with the poison of vainglory, because vainglory is a loss of simplicity and an insincere way of life.

45. It often happens that when a worm becomes fully grown it gets wings and rises up on high. So too when vainglory increases it gives birth to pride, the origin and consummation of all evils.

46. He who is without this sickness is near to salvation, but he who is not free from it is far from the glory of the Saints.

This is the twenty-second step. He who is not caught by vain-glory will never fall into that mad pride which is so hateful to God.

Step 23

On mad[2] pride, and, in the same Step, on unclean blasphemous thoughts.

1. Pride is denial of God, an invention of the devil, the despising of men, the mother of condemnation, the offspring of praise, a sign of sterility, flight from divine assistance, the precursor of madness, the herald of falls, a foothold for satanic possession, source of anger, door of hypocrisy, the support of demons, the guardian of sins, the patron of unsympathy, the rejection of compassion, a bitter inquisitor, an inhuman judge, an opponent of God, a root of blasphemy.

2. The beginning of pride is the consummation of vainglory; the middle is the humiliation of our neighbour, the shameless parade of our labours, complacency in the heart, hatred of exposure; and the end is denial of God's help, the extolling of one's own exertions, fiendish character.

3. Let all of us who wish to avoid this pit listen: this passion often finds food in gratitude, for at first it does not shamelessly advise us to deny God. I have seen people who thank God with their mouth but mentally magnify themselves. And this is confirmed by that Pharisee who said ironically: God, I thank Thee.[3]

4. Where a fall has overtaken us, there pride has already pitched its tent; because a fall is an indication of pride.

5. A venerable man said to me: 'Suppose that there are twelve shameful passions. If we deliberately love one of them (I mean, pride), it will fill the place of the remaining eleven.'

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[1] St. Luke xiv, 11.
[2] Or, 'headless', 'headstrong'.
[3] St. Luke xviii, 11.

6. A haughty monk contradicts violently, but a humble one cannot even look one in the face.

7. The cypress does not bend to live on earth; nor does a lofty-hearted monk do so to acquire obedience.

8. A proud person grasps at authority, because otherwise he cannot, or rather, does not want to be utterly lost.

9. God resists the proud.[1] Who then can have mercy on them? Every proud-hearted man is unclean before God.[2] Who then can cleanse such a person?

10. The proud are corrected by falling into sin.[3] It is a devil which spurs them on.[4] But apostasy is madness. In the first two cases people have often been healed by men, but the last is humanly incurable.

11. He who refuses reproof shows his passion (pride), but he who accepts it is free of this fetter.

12. An angel[5] fell from heaven without any other passion except pride, and so we may ask whether it is possible to ascend to heaven by humility alone without any other of the virtues.

13. Pride is loss of wealth and sweat. They cried but there was none to save, no doubt because they cried with pride. They cried to the Lord and He heard them not,[6] no doubt because they were not trying to cut out the faults against which they prayed.

14. A most learned old man spiritually admonished a proud brother, but he in his blindness said: 'Excuse me, Father, I am not proud.' The wise old man said to him: 'What clearer proof of this passion could you have given us, son, than to say, "I am not proud"?'

15. Such people can make good use of submission, a more rigorous and humiliating life, and the reading of the supernatural feats of the Fathers. Perhaps even then, there will be little hope of salvation for those suffering from this malady.

16. It is shameful to be proud of the adornments of others, but utter madness to fancy one deserves God's gifts. Be exalted only by such merits[7] as you had before your birth. But what you got after your birth, as also birth itself, God gave you. Only those virtues which you have obtained without the co-operation of the mind belong to you, because your mind was given you by God. Only such victories as you have won without the co-operation of the body have been accomplished by your efforts, because the body is not yours but a work of God.

17. Do not be self-confident until you hear the final sentence passed upon yourself, bearing in mind the guest who got as far as joining in the marriage feast and then was bound hand and foot and cast out into the outer darkness.[8]

18. Do not lift up your neck, creature of earth! For many, though holy and spiritual, were cast from heaven.

19. When the demon of pride gets a foothold in his servants, he appears to them either in sleep or in a waking vision, as though in the form of a holy angel or some martyr, and gives them a revelation of mysteries, or a free bestowal of spiritual gifts, so that these unfortunates may be deceived and completely lose their wits.

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[1] James iv, 6.
[2] Proverbs xvi, 5.
[3] St. Augustine says that God allows the proud to fall into sin to humble them.
[4] Cf. 'I was given a thorn in the flesh, an angel of satan' (2 Corinthians xii, 7).
[5] I.e. Lucifer.
[6] Psalm xvii, 42.
[7] Or, 'successes', 'achievements', 'exploits'.
[8] St. Matthew xxii, 13.

20. Even if we endure a thousand deaths for Christ, even so we shall not repay all that is due. For the blood of God, and the blood of his servants are quite different, and I am thinking here of the dignity and not of the actual physical substance.

21. We should constantly be examining and comparing ourselves with the holy Fathers and the lights who lived before us, and we should then find that we have not yet entered upon the path of the ascetic life, and have not kept our vow in holy fashion, and in disposition are still living in the world.

22. A monk, properly speaking, is he whose soul's eye does not look haughtily, and whose bodily feeling is unmoved.

23. A monk is he who calls his enemies to combat like wild beasts, and provokes them as they flee from him.

24. A monk experiences unceasing rapture of mind and sorrow of life.

25. A monk is one who is conditioned by virtues as others are by pleasures.

26. A monk possesses unfailing light in the eye of the heart.

27. A monk has an abyss of humility into which he has plunged and suffocated every evil spirit.

28. Forgetfulness of our sins is the result of conceit, for the remembrance of them leads to humility.

29. Pride is utter penury of soul, under the illusion of wealth, imagining light in its darkness. The foul passion not only blocks our advance, but even hurls us down from the heights.

30. The proud man is a pomegranate, rotten inside, while outwardly radiant with beauty.

31. A proud monk has no need of a devil; he has become a devil and enemy to himself.

32. Darkness is foreign to light; and a proud person is foreign to every virtue.

33. In the hearts of the proud, blasphemous words will find birth, but in the souls of the humble, heavenly contemplations.

34. A thief abominates the sun, as a proud man scorns the meek.

35. I do not know how it is, but the proud for the most part remain ignorant of their real selves, and they imagine that they are victorious over their passions, and they only realize their poverty when they depart from this life.

36. The man enmeshed in pride will need the help of God, for the salvation of men cannot avail him.[1]

37. I once caught this mad[2] imposter as it was rising in my heart bearing on its shoulders its mother, vainglory. Roping them with the noose of obedience and thrashing them with the whip of humility, I demanded how they got access to me. At last, when flogged, they said: We have neither beginning nor birth, for we are the originators of all the passions. Contrition of heart that is born of obedience is our real enemy; we cannot bear to be subject to anyone; that is why we fell from heaven, though we had authority there.

In brief, we are the parents of all that opposes humility; for everything which furthers humility, opposes us. Our power extends to all short of heaven, so where will you run from our presence? We often accompany patience under dishonour, and obedience, and freedom from anger, and lack of resentment, and service of one's neighbour. Our offspring are the sins of spiritual people: anger, calumny, spite, irritability, shouting, blasphemy, hypocrisy, hatred, envy, disputing, self-will, disobedience.

[1] Psalm lix 13; cvii 13.

[2] See above, p. 76, note 266.

There is only one thing in which we have no power to meddle; and we shall tell you this, for we cannot bear your blows: If you keep up a sincere condemnation of yourself before the Lord you can count us as weak as a cobweb. For pride's saddle-horse, as you see, is vainglory on which I am mounted. But holy humility and self-accusation laugh at both the horse and its rider, happily singing the song of victory: Let us sing to the Lord, for gloriously has He been glorified: horse and rider He has thrown into the sea[1] and into the abyss of humility.

This is the twenty-third step. He who mounts it (if any can mount it) will be strong.

Concerning unmentionable blasphemous thoughts[2]

38. We have heard that from a troublesome root and mother comes a most troublesome offspring; that is to say, unspeakable blasphemy is born from foul pride. So it is necessary to bring it into the open, for it is no ordinary creature, but the most cruel of all our foes and enemies. And what is still worse, it is difficult to put into words, confess, or expose these thoughts to a spiritual physician. And so this unholy disease has produced frustration and despair in many, destroying all their hope like a worm in a tree.

39. During the Holy Liturgy, at the very moment when the Mysteries are being accomplished, this vile enemy often blasphemes the Lord and the holy events that are being enacted. This shows clearly that it is not our soul that pronounces these unspeakable, godless and unthinkable words within us, but the God-hating fiend who fled from heaven for uttering blasphemies against the Lord there too, as it would seem. For if these shameless and disgraceful words are my own, how could I worship after receiving the gift? How can I praise and revile at one and the same time?

40. This deceiver and corrupter of souls has often driven many out of their mind. No other thought is so difficult to tell in confession as this. That is why it often remains with many to the very end of their lives. For nothing gives the demons and bad thoughts such power over us as nourishing and hiding them in our heart unconfessed.

41. No one in the face of blasphemous thoughts need think that the guilt lies within him, for the Lord is the Knower of hearts and He is aware that such words and thoughts do not come from us but from our foes.

42. Drunkenness is a cause of stumbling, and pride is a cause of unseemly thoughts. As far as his stumbling is concerned the drunkard is not to blame, but he will certainly be punished for his drunkenness.

43. When we stand in prayer, those unclean and unspeakable thoughts assail us; but if we continue praying to the end they retire at once, for they do not fight those who stand up to them.

44. The godless foe not only blasphemes God and everything Divine but utters the most shameful and indecent words within our minds to make us either give up praying or else despair of ourselves. He has prevented many from praying, and separated many from the Holy Mysteries.

45. This evil and inhuman tyrant has wearied the bodies of some with grief, has exhausted others with fasting, and has given them no rest. He does this with those living the monastic life as well as with people living in the world, suggesting to them that there is no hope whatsoever of salvation for them, and assuring them that they are more to be pitied and more wretched than all the unbelievers and heathen.

46. He who is troubled by the spirit of blasphemy and wants to be delivered from it should know for certain that it is not his soul that is the cause of such thoughts but the impure demon who once said to

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[1] Exodus xv, 1

[2] Some versions make a new step or chapter here.

the Lord: All these things will I give Thee if Thou wilt fall down and worship me.[1] And so let us too humiliate him and, without paying the least regard to his suggestion, say to him: 'Get thee behind me, Satan! I shall worship the Lord my God, and Him only will I serve.[2] Thy labour and thy word will return upon thy head, and thy blasphemies will come down upon thy crown[3] in the present and in the future world. Amen.'

47. He who wants to grapple with the demon of blasphemy in any other way is like a man trying to hold lightning in his hands. For how will you catch, or contend and grapple with one who bursts into the heart suddenly like the wind, utters words quicker than a flash, and immediately vanishes? All other enemies stop, wrestle, linger and give time to those who wish to struggle with them. But not this one: he has scarcely appeared, and he is gone; he has hardly said a word, and he is away.

48. This demon often likes to haunt the minds of simple and innocent people, and they are more upset and bewildered by it than others. We can certainly say of them that all this happens to them not from self-esteem but from the envy of the demons.

49. We ought to stop judging and condemning our neighbour, and then blasphemous thoughts will not alarm us; for the former is the occasion and root of the latter.

50. As one who is shut up in his house hears the words of passers-by without joining in their conversation, so the soul keeping to itself and overhearing the diabolical blasphemies is troubled by what is said by the demon passing by it.

51. He who despises this foe is delivered from its torture. But he who contrives some other way to wage war with it will end by submitting to it. He who wishes to conquer the spirits with words is like one trying to lock up the winds.

52. One careful monk who was troubled by this demon wore out his flesh for twenty years by fasts and vigils. But as he felt no benefit, he wrote his temptation on a card and went to a certain holy man and gave him the card and bowed his face to the earth, not daring to look up. As soon as the elder had read it he smiled and, raising the brother, he said to him: 'Lay your hand on my neck, son.' And when the brother had done that, the great man said: 'On my neck, brother, be this sin, for as many years as it may or may not be active in you; only after this, ignore it.' And this monk assured me that even before he had left the elder's cell, his infirmity had gone. The man who had been tempted in this way told me this himself, offering thanksgiving to God.

He who has won the victory over this infirmity, has banished pride.

Step 24

On meekness, simplicity, guilelessness which come not from nature but from habit, and about malice.

1. The morning light precedes the sun, and the precursor of all humility is meekness. Therefore let us hear in what order the Light arranges these virtues, for He says: Learn of Me, for I am meek and humble in heart.[4] So then before looking at the sun, which is humility, we must be illumined by the light, which is meekness, and then we can look with a clear gaze at the sun. For it is impossible, absolutely impossible, to gaze upon the sun before we have experienced that light, as we have learnt from the order in which the Lord has put these virtues.

2. Meekness is an unchangeable state of mind, which remains the same in honour and dishonour.

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[1] St. Matthew iv, 9.
[2] St. Matthew iv, 10.
[3] Psalm vii, 17.
[4] St. Matthew xi, 29.

3. Meekness consists in praying calmly and sincerely for a troublesome neighbour.

4. Meekness is a rock overlooking the sea of irritability, which breaks all the waves that dash against it yet remains completely unmoved.

5. Meekness is the buttress of patience, the door, or rather, the mother of love, and the foundations of discernment, for it is said: The Lord will teach the meek His way.[1] It prepares us for the forgiveness of sins; it is boldness in prayer, an abode of the Holy Spirit. But to whom shall I look? Even to him that is meek and quiet.[2]

6. Meekness is the fellow-worker of obedience, the guide of the brotherhood, a curb for the furious, a check to the irritable, a minister of joy, the imitation of Christ, something proper to angels, shackles for demons, a shield against peevishness.

7. In meek hearts the Lord finds rest, but a turbulent soul is a seat of the devil.

8. The meek shall inherit the earth,[3] or rather shall exercise dominion over it, but bad-tempered folk will be harried out of their land.

9. A meek soul is a throne of simplicity, but an angry mind is a creator of evil.

10. A quiet soul makes room for words of wisdom, for the Lord will guide the meek in judgment,[4] or rather, in discretion.

11. An upright soul is a fellow lodger with humility, but an evil one is a daughter of pride.

12. The souls of the meek are filled with knowledge, but an angry mind is a denizen of darkness and ignorance.

13. An angry man and an imposter met one another, and it was impossible to find a true word in their conversation. Unveiling the heart of the former you will find frenzy; looking into the soul of the other you will see malice.

14. Simplicity is a constant habit of soul that has become immune to evil thinking.

15. Evil is a science, or rather, a diabolical deformity, bereft of truth and thinking it can hide that fact from public notice.[5]

16. Hypocrisy is a contrary state of body and soul interwoven with every kind of subterfuge.

17. Guilelessness is a joyous state of soul far removed from all ulterior motive.

18. Honesty is unmeddling thought, sincere character, frank and unpremeditated speech.

19. Innocent is he whose soul is in its natural purity as it was created, and who makes intercession for all.

20. Malice is a perversion of honesty, a deceitful way of thinking, falsely screened by affability, false oaths, ambiguous words, dissimulation of heart, an abyss of cunning, deceit that has become a habit, conceit turned into nature, a foe to humility, a pretence of penitence, diminution of mourning, hostility to confession, wilfulness, an agent of falls, a hindrance to resurrection, a smiling at offences, affected frowning, false reverence, diabolical life.

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[1] Psalm xxiv, 9.

[2] Isaiah lxvi, 2.

[3] St. Matthew v, 5.

[4] Psalm xxiv, 9.

[5] From this paragraph till the end of the step there is much dislocation of the text, and the order varies in different manuscripts

21. An evil person is a namesake and companion of the devil; that is why the Lord taught us so to name the devil, saying: Deliver us from the evil one.[1]

22. Let us run from the precipice of hypocrisy and from the pit of duplicity, hearing him who said: Evil-doers shall be destroyed,[2] as the green herb they shall quickly wither,[3] for such folk are food for demons.

23. God is called love, and also justice. That is why the wise man[4] in the Song of Songs says to the pure heart: Justice has loved thee.[5] Also the father of the wise man says: Good and just is the Lord.[6] And of those who are His namesakes He says that they are saved: Who saves the upright of heart;[7] and again: His countenance sees and visits those who are honest and just.[8]

24. The first property of the age of childhood is uniform simplicity, and as long as Adam had it, he did not see the nakedness of his soul, or the indecency of his flesh.

25. Excellent too is that simplicity which is in some by nature, yes, and blessed, but not as much as that which is grafted in with toil and trouble after repenting from sin. For the former is sheltered and protected from much affectation and passion, but the latter leads to the highest humility and meekness. The former has not much reward, but the latter—infinite, infinite.

26. Let all of us who wish to attract the Lord to ourselves draw near to Him as disciples to the Master, simply, without hypocrisy, without duplicity or guile, not out of idle curiosity. He Himself is simple and absolute, and He wants souls that come to Him to be simple and innocent. For you will surely never see simplicity separated from humility.

27. The evil man is a false prophet who thinks that from words he can catch thoughts, and from outward appearance, dispositions of the heart.

28. I have seen honest souls who learnt to be evil from evil people, and I wondered how they could lose their natural disposition and superiority so soon. But it is as easy for the honest to fall from grace, as it is difficult to change the dishonest. But true exile, obedience and guarding of the lips have often had great power, and have wonderfully restored the incurable.

29. If knowledge puffs up many people, simplicity and lack of learning can perhaps in the same measure humble them. All the same there are here and there people who pride themselves on their ignorance.

30. The thrice-blessed and most simple Paul was a clear example for us, for he was the rule and type of blessed simplicity, for no one, absolutely no one, has ever seen or heard or could see so much progress made in so short a time.

31. A simple-hearted monk is like a rational dumb animal, who lays his burden on his director. An animal does not answer back his master who yokes him, nor does an honest soul do this with his superior, but follows wherever he is led; though sent to the slaughter, he could make no protest.

32. It is hard for the rich to enter the Kingdom of Heaven[9] and equally hard for those who are foolishly wise to enter simplicity.

33. A fall has often corrected the clever, giving them salvation and innocence in spite of themselves.

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[1] St. Matthew vi, 13.
[2] Psalm xxxvi, 9.
[3] Psalm xxxvi, 2.
[4] I.e. Solomon.
[5] Song of Songs, i, 3.
[6] Psalm xxiv, 8.
[7] Psalm vii, 11.
[8] Cf. Psalm x, 8.
[9] St. Matthew xix, 23.

34. Struggle to elude your own prudence and by so doing you will find salvation and honesty through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

He who has the strength for this step, let him take courage; for he has become an imitator of Christ his Master and has been saved.

Step 25

On the destroyer of the passions, most sublime humility, which is rooted in spiritual feeling.

1. He who thinks that it is possible to use the visible word in order to describe the sensation and effect of the love of the Lord exactly, holy humility gracefully, blessed purity truly, divine enlightenment clearly, the fear of God honestly, assurance of heart sincerely, and imagines that by his description of things of this kind he will enlighten those who have never actually experienced them, is like a man who by words and comparisons wants to give an idea of the sweetness of honey to people who have never tasted it. But just as the latter talks in vain, not to say babbles, so the former either gives the impression of having no experience of what he is talking about, or else has become the mere toy of vainglory.[1]

2. This subject sets a treasure before us as a touchstone, preserved in earthen vessels, that is to say in our bodies, and it is of a quality that baffles all description. This treasure has one inscription which is incomprehensible because it comes from above, and those who try to explain it with words give themselves great and endless trouble. And the inscription runs thus: Holy Humility.

3. Let all who are led by the Spirit of God enter with us into this spiritual and wise gathering, holding in their spiritual hands the God-inscribed tablets of knowledge. We have met, we have investigated, and we have probed the meaning of this precious inscription. And one said: 'It[2] means constant oblivion of one's achievements.' Another: 'It is the acknowledgement of oneself as the last of all and the greatest sinner of all.' And another: 'The mind's recognition of one's weakness and impotence.' Another again: 'In fits of rage it means to forestall one's neighbour and be first to stop the quarrel.' And again another: 'Recognition of divine grace and divine mercy.' And again another: 'The feeling of a contrite soul, and the renunciation of one's own will.' But when I had listened to all this and had attentively and soberly considered it, I found that I had not been able to comprehend the blessed sense of that virtue from what had been said. Therefore, last of all, having gathered what fell from the lips of those learned and blessed fathers as a dog gathers the crumbs that fall from the table, I too gave my definition of it and said: 'Humility is a nameless grace in the soul, its name known only to those who have learned it by experience. It is unspeakable wealth, a name and gift from God, for it is said: Learn not from an angel, not from man, and not from a book, but from Me, that is, from Me indwelling, from My illumination and action in you, for I am meek and humble in heart and in thought and in spirit, and your souls shall find rest from conflicts and relief from arguments.'[3]

4. The appearance of this sacred vine is one thing during the winter of the passions, another in the spring of fruit-blossom, yet another in the actual harvest of the virtues. Yet all these different stages concur in gladness and fruit-bearing, and therefore they all have their own signs and sure evidence of fruit to come. For as soon as the cluster of holy humility begins to blossom within us, we at once begin, though with an effort, to hate all human glory and praise, and to banish from ourselves irritation and anger. In proportion as this queen of virtues makes progress in our soul by spiritual growth, so we regard all the good deeds accomplished by us as nothing, or rather as an abomination, assuming that

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[1] St. John Chrysostom says: 'The gifts of God are so great that people can scarcely ever believe it. And it is not surprising if they cannot understand them till they know by experience.' (On 1 Timothy, *Homily* 4.)

[2] I.e. humility.

[3] St. Matthew xi, 29.

every day we add more and more to the unknown burden of our dissipation. We suspect the very abundance of the divine gifts showered upon us to be beyond our deserts and to aggravate our punishment. So our mind remains unrifled, reposing securely in the casket of modesty, only hearing the knocks and jeers of the thieves, without being subject to any of their threats; because modesty is an inviolable safe.

5. Thus we have ventured in a few words to philosophize about the blossoming and growth of this ever-flourishing fruit. But what is the perfect reward of this holy virtue? You who are near the Lord must ask the Lord Himself. It is impossible to gauge the quantity of this holy wealth; and to explain its quality is still more impossible. However, as regards its distinguishing characteristics, we must try to express the thought that comes to our mind.

6. Painstaking repentance, mourning cleansed of all impurity, and holy humility in beginners, are as different and distinct from each other as yeast and flour from bread. By open repentance the soul is broken and refined; it is brought to a certain unity, I will even say a commingling with God, by means of the water of genuine sorrow. Then, kindled by the fire of the Lord, blessed humility becomes bread and is made firm without the leaven of pride. Therefore when this holy three-fold cord or, rather, heavenly rainbow, unites into one power and activity, it acquires its own effects and properties. And whatever you name as a sign of one of them, is a token also of another. And so I shall try to prove what I have just said by a brief demonstration.

7. The first and paramount property of this excellent and admirable trinity is the acceptance of indignity with the greatest pleasure, when the soul receives it with outstretched hands and welcomes it as something that relieves and cauterizes diseases of the soul and great sins. The second property is the loss of all bad temper, and modesty at its appeasement. The third and highest degree is a true distrust of one's good qualities and a constant desire to learn.

8. The end of the Law and the Prophets is Christ for the righteousness of every believer.[1] And the end of the impure passions is vainglory and pride for everyone who does not deal with this matter. But their destroyer, this spiritual stag,[2] keeps him who lives with it immune from all deadly poison. For where can the poison of hypocrisy appear in humility? Where is the poison of calumny? And where will a snake nestle and hide? Will it not rather be drawn out of the earth of the heart and be killed and destroyed?

9. In union with humility it is impossible that there should be any appearance of hatred, or any kind of dispute, or even a sniff of disobedience, unless perhaps faith is called in question.

10. He who has taken humility as his bride is above all gentle, kind, full of compunction, sympathetic, calm, bright, compliant, inoffensive, wide awake, not indolent and (why say more?) free from passion; for the Lord remembered us in our humility, and delivered us from our enemies,[3] and our passions and impurities.

11. A humble monk will not meddle with mysteries, but a proud one will pry into judgments.[4]

12. The demons praised one of the most discerning brothers, appearing to him in visible form. But this most wise man said to them: 'If you cease to praise me through the thoughts of my heart, I shall conclude from your departure that I am great. But if you continue to praise me, from your very praise I shall guess my impurity; for every proud-hearted man is unclean before the Lord.[5] And so either go away from me, and then I shall become great, or else praise me and through you I shall obtain more humility.' Struck with bewilderment, they immediately vanished from sight.

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[1] 1 Romans, X, 4.
[2] I.e. humility (Psalm xli, 1).
[3] Psalm cxxxv, 23—4.
[4] Or, 'the ways of God'.
[5] Proverbs xvi, 5.

13. May your soul not be a pond of the river of life, a pond which is sometimes full and sometimes dried up from the heat of glory and exaltation, but may it become a fountain of dispassion ever welling up into a river of poverty.[1]

14. Know, beloved, that the valleys shall stand deep in corn[2] and spiritual fruit. This valley is a soul low and humble among the mountains, that is, it is filled with labours and virtues, and always remains lowly and steadfast. David did not say, 'I have fasted', 'I have kept vigil', or 'I have lain on the bare earth', but 'I humbled myself, and soon the Lord saved me.'[3]

15. Repentance raises the fallen, mourning knocks at the gate of heaven, and holy humility opens it; but I affirm this and I worship Trinity in Unity, and Unity in Trinity.

16. All visible things get their light from the sun, and all that is done according to reason gets its force from humility. Where there is no light, everything is dark; where there is no humility, all that we have is rotten.

17. In the whole universe there is one place[4] that has only once seen the sun, and there is one thought[5] which has often given birth to humility. And there was one day only on which the whole world rejoiced,[6] and there is one virtue only which the demons cannot imitate.[7]

18. It is one thing to exalt oneself, another not to exalt oneself, and another to humble oneself. One person may be always judging others; another does not judge others, but he does not condemn himself; a third, although he is innocent, is always passing judgment on himself.

19. It is one thing to be humble, another to strive for humility, and another to praise the humble. The first belongs to the perfect, the second to the truly obedient, and the third to all the faithful.

20. He who has humbled himself within will not be cheated by his lips; for what is not in the treasury cannot be brought out through this door.

21. A horse when alone often imagines that it is galloping, but when it is with others it finds out how slow it is.

22. It is a sign of the beginning of health when our thought no longer prides itself on its natural gifts. But as long as it has that stench in its nose,[8] it cannot detect the fragrance of myrrh.

23. Holy humility said: My lover will not rebuke, or judge, or rule, or display his wisdom, until he has attained union with me. For when he is united with me, the law is no longer applicable to him.[9]

24. The foul fiend whispered praise into the heart of an ascetic who was striving for blessed humility, but by divine inspiration he contrived to conquer the guile of the spirits by a pious ruse. He rose and wrote on the wall of his cell the names of the highest virtues in order, that is: perfect love, angelic humility, pure prayer, inviolable chastity and others like these. And so when thoughts of vainglory began to praise him, he said to them: 'Let us go and be judged.' Then, going to the wall, he read the names and cried to himself: 'When you possess all these, then you will know how far you still are from God!'

25. We cannot describe the power and essence of this sun, humility, but from its properties and effects we can explain its intrinsic nature.

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[1] Cf. St. Matthew v, 3; St. John, iv, 14.

[2] Psalm lxiv, 14.

[3] Psalm cxv, 5.

[4] I.e. the floor of the Red Sea.

[5] Perhaps the thought of death, the last judgement or Christ's Passion.

[6] This might be either the day of Christ's Resurrection or of His Nativity.

[7] The one virtue inaccessible to the demons is humility.

[8] I.e. pride.

[9] Cf. 1 Timothy i, 9.

26. Humility is a divine shelter to prevent us from seeing our achievements. Humility is an abyss of self-abasement, inaccessible to any thief. Humility is a strong tower against the face of the enemy.[1] The enemy shall not prevail against him, nor shall the son, or rather, the thought of iniquity do him evil: and he will cut off his enemies from his face and will conquer them that hate him.[2]

27. Besides all the distinguishing properties indicated above, the great possessor of this wealth also has others in his soul. And all these properties except one are visible signs of this wealth. You will know with certainty that you have this holy possession within you by an abundance of unspeakable light, by an unutterable love for prayer; and before this is attained, by a heart that does not judge the faults of others. And the precursor of what has been said is hatred of all vainglory.

28. He who has got to know himself by discerning each feeling of his soul has sown on earth; but those who have not thus sown cannot expect humility to blossom in them.

29. He who has come to know himself has obtained an understanding of the fear of the Lord; and he who has walked by the aid of this fear, has reached the door of love.

30. Humility is the door of the Kingdom that introduces those who draw near to it. And I think that the Lord was speaking of this door when He said: He shall enter and shall pass out of life without fear, and shall find pasture and green grass in paradise. All who have entered the monastic life by any other door are thieves and robbers of their own life.[3]

31. We who wish to understand must not cease to examine this. And if our soul is sufficiently perceptive to realize that our neighbour is better in every respect than we are, then the Divine mercy is near us.

32. It is impossible for snow to burst into flame; still more difficult is it for humility to dwell in an unorthodox person. This is something which the pious and faithful achieve, and then only when they have been purified.

33. Most of us call ourselves sinners, and perhaps really think it; but it is indignity that tests the heart.

34. He who is hastening to that tranquil harbour of humility will never cease to do all that he can and will drive himself on by words and thoughts and afterthoughts and various means, by investigations and researches, and by his whole life, by prayers and supplication, meditating and reflection, and using all imaginable means until with God's help and by abiding in humiliations and the most despised conditions and by toils he delivers the ship of his soul from the ever-recurring storms of the sea of vainglory. For he who is delivered from this sin, is easily pardoned all the rest of his sins, like the publican in the Gospel.

35. There are some who all their lives use the bad deeds previously done by them, and for which they had received forgiveness, as a motive for humility, thereby driving out their vain self-esteem. Others, having in mind Christ's passion, regard themselves always as debtors. Others hold themselves cheap for their daily defects. Others as a result of their besetting temptations, infirmities and sins have mortified their pride. Others for want of graces have appropriated the mother of graces (i.e. humility). There are also people (if they still exist) who for the sake of the very gifts of God, in the measure that they receive them, humble themselves and so live as to account themselves unworthy of such wealth, and each day add it to their debt. Such is humility, such is beatitude, such is the perfect reward!

36. When you see or hear that someone has in a few years acquired the most sublime dispassion, then conclude that he travelled by no other way than by this blessed short-cut.

37. A holy team are love and humility; the one exalts, and the other, supporting the exalted ones, never allows it to fall.

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[1] Psalm lx, 4.

[2] Psalm lxxxviii, 23—4.

[3] St. John x, 8—9.

38. Contrition is one thing, self-knowledge is another, humility is another.

39. Contrition is the result of a fall. He who falls is crushed and stands in prayer without boldness but with praiseworthy persistence, as one who is shattered, steadying himself with the staff of hope and using it to drive off the dog of despair.

40. Self-knowledge is a true idea of one's spiritual growth and an unbroken remembrance of one's slightest sins.

41. Humility is the spiritual doctrine of Christ which is spiritually received in the closet of the soul by those who are counted worthy of it. It cannot be explained in visible words.

42. He who says that he fully feels the fragrance of such myrrh yet feels, when praised, even a momentary movement of the heart, or understands the force of the words, that man (let him make no mistake about it) is already mistaken.

43. Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy Name give the glory,[1] I heard someone say with heartfelt conviction. For he knew that human nature cannot ordinarily abide in praise without loss. My praise shall be from Thee in the great Church,[2] that is, in the future life; and before that I cannot accept it without danger to myself.

44. If the limit and rule and characteristic of extreme pride is for a man to feign such virtues as he does not possess for the sake of glory, then it follows that a sign of the deepest humility will be to cheapen ourselves by pretending to have faults that we do not possess. It was in this way that he behaved who took into his hands bread and cheese.[3] Likewise the exponent of purity who took off his clothes and, free of passion, went through the whole city.[4] Such men care nothing for human censure. They have already received invisible power through prayer to reassure all. But he who is anxious about the former will show a lack of the latter.[5] When God is prepared to attend to our prayer, then we can do anything.

45. It is better to offend men than God. God rejoices when He sees us running to meet dishonour, so as to crush, strike and destroy our vain self-esteem.

46. Such virtues are the effect of flight from the world carried to the highest degree, for only the truly great can bear derision from their own people. Do not be surprised at what is said, for no one can climb a ladder in one stride.

47. By this shall all men know that we are God's disciples,[6] not because the devils are subject to us, but because our names are written in the heaven of humility.[7]

48. The natural property of the lemon tree is such that it lifts its branches upwards when it has no fruit, but the more the branches bend down the more fruit they bear. Those who have the mind to understand will grasp the meaning of this.

49. Holy humility obtains from God the power to bear fruit thirty fold, sixty fold and one hundredfold.[8] The dispassionate attain to the last degree, the courageous to the middle, and all can rise to the first.

50. He who has come to know himself is never tricked into undertaking what is beyond him, but keeps his feet safely on the blessed path of humility.

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[1] Psalm cxiii, 9.
[2] Psalm xxi, 26.
[3] Abba Symeon, 'Authentic Tales of the Ascetic Labours of the Holy Fathers' (74).
[4] Abba Serapion, cf. Palladius, *Lausiac History*, ch. 72.
[5] That is to say, he who is afraid of human criticism will lack power in prayer.
[6] St. John xiii, 35.
[7] St. Luke x, 20.
[8] Cf. St. Matthew xiii, 9.

51. Birds fear the sight of a hawk, and those who practise humility fear the sound of argument.

52. Many have received salvation without prophecies and lights, without signs and wonders; but without humility no one will enter the marriage chamber, because humility is the guardian of these gifts, and without her they will bring frivolous people to ruin.

53. For those of us who do not wish to humble ourselves the Lord has arranged in His providence that no one can see his faults as well as his neighbour does. So we are bound to give thanks for our healing not to ourselves but to our neighbour and to God.

54. The man of humble mind always loathes his own will as wayward, and in his requests to the Lord he studies with unwavering faith to learn and to obey. He does not direct his attention to the life of his masters but casts his care upon God who used an ass to teach Balaam his duty. A worker of this kind, although he does everything and thinks and speaks according to the will of God, yet he never trusts himself. Self-confidence for the humble is just as much a weight and a burden as another man's choice is for the proud.

55. It seems to me that it is the property only of an angel never even secretly to commit sins, for I hear an earthly angel say: I know nothing against myself; yet am I not hereby justified. But He who examines me is the Lord.[1] Therefore we should unceasingly condemn and reproach ourselves so as to cast off involuntary sins through voluntary humiliations. Otherwise, if we do not, at our departure we shall certainly be subjected to heavy punishment.

56. He who asks God for less than his desert will certainly receive more than he deserves. This is demonstrated by the publican who asked for forgiveness but received justification.[2] And the robber only asked to be remembered in His Kingdom, but he inherited all Paradise.[3]

57. It is impossible to see fire, small or great, in any natural creature; and it is absolutely impossible that anything of a material nature should be found in sincere humility. As long as we fall into voluntary sins, there is not this humility in us; and that is the sign that there is still something material in us.

58. The Lord, knowing that the virtue of the soul is modelled on outward behaviour, took a towel[4] and showed us how to walk the way of humility. For the soul becomes like its bodily occupations. It conforms itself to its activities and takes its shape from them. Sovereignty served as a ground for arrogance for one of the angels, although that was not why it was conferred on him.

59. He who sits on a throne has certain dispositions, and he who sits on a dunghill has others. And that is perhaps why that great saint sat on the dunghill outside the city, for then when he had obtained perfect humility he said with deep feeling: I abhor myself and melt away, and have accounted myself earth and ashes.[5]

60. I find that Manasseh sinned as no other man has sinned by defiling the temple of God with idols and contaminating all the divine worship. If the whole world had undertaken a fast for him it could have made no reparation for this. But humility had power to remedy even what was incurable in him. If Thou hadst desired sacrifice I would have given it, says David to God; but Thou wilt not be pleased with holocausts, that is, with bodies consumed by fasting. The sacrifice for God—and everyone knows what follows.[6]

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[1] 1 Corinthians iv, 4.
[2] Cf. St. Luke xviii, 10.
[3] Cf. St. Luke xxiii, 43.
[4] John xiii, 4.
[5] Job xlii, 6.
[6] 'The sacrifice for God is a contrite spirit; a contrite and humble heart God will not despise' (Psalm l, 17).

61. I have sinned against the Lord, blessed humility once cried to God after committing adultery and murder; and he soon heard: The Lord has put away thy sin.[1]

62. The ever-memorable Fathers laid down that the way to humility and its foundations is bodily toil. And I would say obedience and honesty of heart, because they are naturally opposed to self-esteem.

63. If the pride of some of the angels made them demons,[2] no doubt humility can make angels out of demons. So those who have fallen may take courage!

64. Let us hasten with all our powers to fight our way to the crest of humility. Failing this, let us at least mount on her shoulders. And if our effort is not sufficient for this, let us at least not fall out of her arms; for I hardly think a man who falls out of them will receive any eternal gift.

65. The sinews of humility and its ways, but not its signs, are: poverty, hidden withdrawal from the world, concealment of wisdom, simplicity of speech, asking of alms, hiding of nobility, banishment of familiarity, putting chatter out of court.

66. Nothing can so humble the soul as a state of destitution and a beggar's subsistence. For we only prove to be philosophers and lovers of God when, having the possibility of exaltation, we flee from it irrevocably.

67. If you take up arms against some passion, take humility as an ally, for she will tread upon the asp and basilisk, that is, sin and despair, and will trample underfoot the lion and serpent,[3] that is, the devil and the snake of the body.

68. Humility is a heavenly siphon which from the abyss of sins can raise the soul to heaven.

69. Someone saw in his heart the beauty of humility and, seized with amazement, asked her to tell him the name of her parent. Smiling joyfully and serenely at him, humility replied: 'How is it you are in a hurry to know the name of my parent? He is nameless, and I cannot tell you until you possess God.' To Him be the glory for ever and ever! Amen.

The mother of the fountain is the deep sea, and the fountain of discernment is humility.

Step 26

On discernment of thoughts, passions and virtues

1. Discernment in beginners is true knowledge of themselves; in intermediate souls it is a spiritual sense that faultlessly distinguishes what is truly good from what is of nature and opposed to it; and in the perfect it is the knowledge which they possess by divine illumination, and which can enlighten with its lamp what is dark in others. Or perhaps, generally speaking, discernment is, and is recognized as, the assured understanding of the divine will on all occasions, in every place and in all matters; and it is only found in those who are pure in heart, and in body and in mouth.

2. He who has piously destroyed within him the three passions[4] has destroyed the five[5] too; but he who has been negligent about the former will not conquer even one passion.

3. Discernment is undefiled conscience and purity of feeling.

[1] 2 Kings xii, 13.
[2] Cf. Isaiah xiv, 12; Ezekiel xxviii, 17; 1 Timothy iii, 6; Jude vi; Revelation xii, 9.
[3] Psalm xc, 13.
[4] Gluttony, cupidity, vainglory.
[5] Lust, anger, despair, despondency, pride (St. Gregory of Sinai, ch. 91).

4. Let no one on seeing or hearing something supernatural in the monastic way of life fall into unbelief out of ignorance; for where the supernatural God dwells, much that is supernatural happens.

5. Every satanic conflict in us comes from these three generic causes: either from negligence, or from pride, or from the envy of the demons. The first is pitiable, the second is disastrous, but the third is blessed.

6. After God, let us have our conscience as our aim and rule in all things, so that we may know which way the wind is blowing and set our sails accordingly.

7. In all our actions in which we try to please God the demons dig three pits for us. In the first, they endeavour to prevent any good at all from being done. In the second, after their first defeat, they try to secure that it should not be done according to the will of God. But when these rogues fail in this too, then, standing quietly before our soul, they praise us for living a thoroughly godly life. The first is to be opposed by zeal and fear of death, the second by obedience and humiliation, and the third by unceasing self-condemnation. We shall be faced by toil of this kind until the divine fire enters into our sanctuary.[1] And then the force of bad habit will no longer exist in us. Our God is a fire consuming[2] all fever (of lust) and movement (of passion), every inclination rooted in us and all blindness and darkness within and without, both visible and spiritual.

8. The demons generally produce in us the opposite of what has just been said. For when they take possession of the soul and extinguish the light of the mind, then there is no longer in us poor wretches either sobriety, or discernment, or self-knowledge or shame; but there is indifference, lack of perception, want of discernment and blindness.

9. What has just been said is known very vividly by those who have subdued their lust in order to become chaste, who have curbed their freedom of speech and have changed from shamelessness to modesty. They know how after the sobering of the mind, after the ending of its blindness, or rather its maiming, they are inwardly ashamed of themselves for what they said and did before when they were living in blindness.

10. If the day in our soul does not draw to evening and grow dark, then the thieves will not come and rob and slay and ruin our soul.

11. Robbery is loss of property. Robbery is doing what is not good as if it were good. Robbery is unobserved captivity of the soul. The slaying of the soul is the death of the rational mind that has fallen into nefarious deeds. Ruin is despair of oneself following on breach of the law.

12. Let no one plead his incapacity to fulfil the commandments of the Gospel, for there are souls who have gone even beyond the commandments. And you will certainly be convinced of what has been said by him who loved his neighbour more than himself and laid down his life for him, although he had not received this commandment from the Lord.[3]

13. Those who have been humbled by their passions may take courage. For even if they fall into every pit and are trapped in all the snares and suffer all maladies, yet after their restoration to health they become physicians, beacons, lamps, and pilots for all, teaching us the habits of every disease and from their own personal experience able to prevent their neighbours from falling.

14. If some are still dominated by their former bad habits, and yet can teach by mere word, let them teach. But they should not have authority as well. For, perhaps, being put to shame by their own words, they will eventually begin to practise what they preach. And even if they do not begin, yet they may be able to help, as I saw happen with others who were stuck in the mud. Bogged down as they were, they were telling the passers-by how they had sunk there, explaining this for their salvation, so

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[1] Psalm lxxvi, 16.
[2] Hebrews xii, 23.
[3] Abba Leo, who redeemed three captives. See John Moschus, *Pratum Spirituale*, ch. 111.

that they should not fall in the same way. However, for the salvation of others, the all-powerful God delivered them too from the mud. But if those who are possessed by passions voluntarily plunge into pleasures, let them teach by silence; for Jesus began both to do and to teach.[1]

15. Perilous, truly perilous is the sea that we humble monks are crossing, a sea in which there are many winds, rocks, whirlpools, pirates, hurricanes, shallows, monsters and waves. A rock in the soul we may consider to be fierce and sudden anger. A whirlpool is hopelessness which seizes the mind and strives to drag it to the depths of despair. A shallow is ignorance which accepts what is bad as good. A monster is this heavy and savage body. Pirates are the most dangerous servants of vainglory who rifle our cargo and the hard-won earnings of the virtues. A wave is a swollen and burdened stomach which by its greed hands us over to the beast. A hurricane is pride that casts us down from heaven, that carries us up to the sky and then down to the abyss.

16. Those engaged in education know what studies are suitable for beginners, what for the intermediate and what for teachers. Let us take sensible precautions not to prolong our study and stop in the beginners' lessons. For to see an old man going to a children's school is a great disgrace.

17. Here is an excellent alphabet for all:

(A)	obedience	(M)	hard work
(B)	fasting	(N)	humiliation
(C)	sackcloth	(O)	contrition
(D)	ashes	(P)	forgetfulness of wrongs
(E)	tears	(Q)	brotherly love
(F)	confession	(R)	meekness
(G)	silence	(S)	simple and unquestioning faith
(H)	humility	(T)	freedom from worldly cares
(I)	vigil	(U)	hateless hatred of parents
(J)	courage	(V)	detachment
(K)	cold	(X)	innocent simplicity
(L)	toil	(Z)	voluntary abasement

18. A good scheme for the advanced, and evidence of their progress is: absence of vainglory, freedom from anger, good hope, silence, discernment, firm remembrance of the judgment, compassion, hospitality, moderation in reproof, passionless prayer, disregard of self.

[1] Acts i, 1.

19. And here is a standard, rule and law for those in the flesh who are piously aiming at perfection in spirit and body:

(A) an unfettered heart	(M) fellow worshipper with angels
(B) perfect love	(N) abyss of knowledge
(C) a well of humanity	(O) house of mysteries
(D) a detached mind	(P) a keeper of secrets
(E) indwelling of Christ	(Q) a saviour of men
(F) security of the light of prayer	(R) god of the demons
(G) abundance of divine illumination	(S) lord of the passions
(H) a longing for death	(T) master of the body
(I) hatred of life	(U) controller of nature
(J) flight from the body	(V) banishment of sin
(K) an intercessor for the world	(X) house of dispassion
(L) a forcer of God	(Z) with the Lord's help an imitator of the Lord

20. We have need of considerable vigilance when the body is sick. The demons, seeing us laid low and temporarily incapable of entering into the struggle with them owing to our infirmity, try to attack us fiercely at such times. The demon of irritation and sometimes of blasphemy hovers round those living in the world in time of illness. And the demon of gluttony and fornication attacks those living outside the world if they have an abundance of all necessaries; but if they are living in an ascetic way of life bereft of all consolation, then the tyrant of despondency[1] and ingratitude is constantly sitting with them.

21. I noticed that the wolf of fornication added to the sufferings of the sick, and during their actual sufferings produced in them movements of the flesh and emissions. And it was astounding to see how the flesh rages and burns with desire amidst violent agonies. And I looked again and saw men lying in bed who were then and there comforted by the power of God or by a sense of compunction, and by this comfort they warded off the pain and reached such a frame of mind in which they never wanted to get rid of their sickness. And again I turned and saw those suffering severely who by illness were delivered from the passions of their soul as if by some penance; and I glorified Him who cleansed clay by clay.

22. A spiritual mind is inevitably wrapped in spiritual understanding.[2] Whether it is in us or not, we must never stop seeking this understanding. And when it makes its appearance, the outward senses of their own accord cease their natural action. Knowing this, one of the wise said: And thou shalt obtain a sense of the Divine.[3]

23. The monastic life in regard to deeds, words, thoughts and movements must be lived with heartfelt conviction. Otherwise it will not be monastic life, let alone angelic life.

24. Divine Providence is one thing, Divine help is another, Divine protection is another, Divine mercy is another, and Divine consolation is another. Providence is displayed in all nature,[4] help only in the

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[1] Cf. Step 13: 1 ff. And see above, p. 52, note 187.

[2] Or, 'insight'. Cf. Philippians i, 9, where the word is rendered by A.V. 'judgment, by R.V. 'discernment', by Douai 'understanding', by Knox 'perception', by Moffat and Phillips 'insight'.

[3] A Russian note refers this passage to St. Nilus of Sinai (died *c.* 450), who was a disciple of St. John Chrysostom.

[4] Another reading is 'creation'.

faithful, protection in the faithful who truly have faith, mercy in those who serve God, and consolation in those who love Him.

25. Sometimes what serves as a medicine for one is poison for another; and sometimes something given to one and the same person at a suitable time serves as a medicine, but at the wrong time it is a poison.

26. I have seen an unskilled physician who, by subjecting a sick man who was contrite in spirit to dishonour, only drove him to despair. And I have seen a skilled physician who operated on an arrogant heart with the knife of dishonour, and drained it of all its evil-smelling pus.

27. I have seen one and the same sick man sometimes drink the medicine of obedience, move, walk and not sleep in order to cleanse his impurity; and sometimes, when the eye of his soul was sick, remain without movement, noiseless and silent. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

28. Some, I know not why (for I have not learned to pry conceitedly into the gifts of God) are by nature, I might say, prone to temperance, or silence, or purity, or modesty, or meekness, or contrition. But others, although almost their own nature itself resists them in this, to the best of their power force themselves; and though they occasionally suffer defeat yet, as men struggling with nature, they are in my opinion higher than the former.

29. Do not boast, man, of the wealth you have obtained without labour. For the Bestower, foreseeing your great hurt, and infirmity, and ruin, at least saves you to some extent by those unmerited gifts.

30. Instruction in childhood, education, studies, when we come of age either help or hinder us in virtue and in the monastic way of life.

31. Angels are a light for monks, and the monastic life is a light for all men. Therefore let monks strive to become a good example in everything, giving no occasion of stumbling in anything[1] in all their works and words. For if the light becomes darkness, how much darker will be that darkness, that is, those living in the world.

32. If you will listen to me, you who are willing to do so, it is best for us not to be versatile and not to split our wretched soul into detachments, and not to challenge to battle with oneself thousands and myriads of the enemies:[2] for it is not in our power to comprehend or even to discover all their hosts.

33. With the help of the Holy Trinity, let us battle with three against three.[3] Otherwise we shall make much toil for ourselves.

34. If He who turned the sea into dry land[4] really abides in us, then our Israel too, that is, the mind that beholds God, will certainly cross this sea untossed, and will see the Egyptians sunk in the waters of tears. But if He has not yet made His abode in us, who will stand the roaring of the waves[5] of this sea, that is of our flesh?

35. If through our activity God rises in us, His enemies will be scattered; and if we draw near to Him by contemplation, those who hate Him will flee from His face[6] and ours.

36. Let us try to learn divine truth more by toil and sweat than by mere word, for at the time of our departure it is not words but deeds that will have to be shown.

37. Those who hear of treasure hidden in a certain place seek it and, having discovered it, take trouble to keep what they have found; but those who get rich without trouble readily squander their possessions.

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[1] 2 Corinthians vi, 3.
[2] Cf. Psalm xc, 7.
[3] Poverty, chastity, obedience against cupidity, sensuality, ambition.
[4] Psalm lxv, 6.
[5] Psalm lxiv, 8.
[6] Psalm lxvii, 1.

38. It is difficult to overcome former bad habits; and those who keep on adding further new ones to them either fall into despair or get no benefit at all from obedience. But I know that to God all things are possible, and to Him nothing is impossible.[1]

39. Certain people asked me a question difficult to solve and which is beyond the powers of anyone like me, and is not to be found in any of the books that have reached me. For they said: What are the particular offspring of the eight deadly sins? Or which of the three chief sins is the father of the other five (minor sins)? But by pleading praiseworthy ignorance as regards this difficulty, I learnt from the holy men the following: 'The mother of lust is gluttony, and the mother of despondency is vainglory; sorrow and also anger are the offspring of those three (i.e. cupidity, sensuality, ambition); and the mother of pride is vainglory.'

40. In reply to this statement of those ever-memorable Fathers, I began again earnestly to ask them to tell me about the pedigree of the eight sins — which exactly are born from which? And these dispassionate men kindly instructed me, saying: 'The irrational passions have no order or reason, but they have every sort of disorder and every kind of chaos.' And the blessed Fathers confirmed this by convincing examples and supplied many proofs, some of which we are including in the present chapter, in order to draw light from them in judging the rest.

41. The sort of thing I mean is this. Untimely jesting is sometimes born of lust; and sometimes of vainglory, when a man impiously puts on a pious air; and sometimes too of luxury.

42. Much sleep is born sometimes of luxury; and sometimes of fasting, when those who fast are proud of it; and sometimes of despondency; and sometimes from nature.

43. Talkativeness is born sometimes of gluttony, and sometimes of vainglory.

44. Despondency is born sometimes of luxury, and sometimes of lack of fear of God.

45. Blasphemy is properly the offspring of pride; but it is often born of condemnation of our neighbour for the same thing; or of the untimely envy of the demons.

46. Hardness of heart sometimes comes from over-eating, often from coldness and attachment. And again attachment comes sometimes from lust, or from avarice, or from gluttony, or from vainglory, and from many other causes.

47. Malice is born of conceit and anger.

48. Hypocrisy comes from self-satisfaction and wilfulness.

49. All the contrary virtues are born of parents contrary to these. But without enlarging on the subject (for I should not have time if I were to inquire into them all one by one), I will merely say that for all the passions mentioned above, the remedy is humility. Those who have obtained that virtue have won the whole fight.

50. The mother of all the vices is pleasure and malice. He who has them within him will not see the Lord; and abstinence from the first will bring but little benefit without abstinence from the second.

51. As an example of the fear of the Lord let us take the fear that we feel in the presence of rulers and wild beasts; and as an example of desire for God let carnal love serve as a model for you. There is nothing against taking examples of the virtues from what is contrary.

52. The present generation is seriously corrupt and all full of pride and hypocrisy. In bodily labours it perhaps reaches the level of our ancient Fathers, but it is not graced with their gifts, though I think nature never had such need of spiritual gifts as now. And we have got what we deserve. For God is manifested not in labours but in simplicity and humility. And if the power of the Lord is made perfect in weakness, the Lord will certainly not reject a humble worker.

[1] Cf. Job xlli, 2; St. Luke i, 37, etc.

53. When we see one of our athletes in Christ in bodily suffering and infirmity, let us not maliciously seek to learn the explanation of his illness, but rather with simple and genuine love let us try to heal him as though he were part of our own body, and as a fellow warrior wounded in the fray.

54. Sickness is sometimes for the cleansing of sins, and sometimes to humble our mind.

55. When our good and all-gracious Lord and Master sees people too lazy in their exercises, He lays their flesh low with sickness, an exercise that gives them no labour; and sometimes it also cleanses the soul from evil thoughts or passions.

56. All that happens to us, seen or unseen, can be taken by us in a good or a passionate or some middle disposition. I saw three brethren punished: one was angry, one suppressed his grief, but the third reaped the fruit of great joy.

57. I have seen farmers who were casting the same seeds on the earth, yet each had his own special intention. One was thinking of paying his debts; another wanted to get rich; another wished to honour the Lord with his gifts; another's aim was to get praise for his good work from the passers-by on the way of life; another desired to annoy his neighbour who was envious of him; and another did not want to be reproached by people for idleness. Here are the names of those seeds cast to the earth by the farmers: fasting, vigil, alms, services and the like. Let our brethren in the Lord carefully test their intentions.

58. In drawing water from a well we sometimes without noticing it bring up a frog with the water, and so in acquiring the virtues we often get involved in the vices that are imperceptibly entwined with them. The kind of thing I mean is that gluttony is entangled with hospitality; lust with love; cunning with discernment; malice with thoughtfulness; duplicity, procrastination, laziness, contradiction, wilfulness and disobedience with meekness; contempt of instruction with silence; conceit with joy; indolence with hope; harsh judgment with love again; despondency and sloth with quietness; acerbity with chastity; familiarity with humility; and behind them all[1] as a general salve, or rather poison, follows vainglory.

59. We should not be distressed if in asking the Lord for something we remain for a time unheard. It would have pleased the Lord if all men in a single moment had become dispassionate, only His foresight told Him that this would not be for their good.

60. All who ask and do not obtain their requests from God, are denied for one of the following reasons: either because they ask at the wrong time, or because they ask unworthily and vaingloriously, or because if they received they would become conceited, or finally, because they would become negligent after obtaining their request.

61. No one, I think, would doubt that the demons and passions leave the soul either for a time or entirely; but few know the reasons why they go away from us.

62. Some of the faithful, and even of the unfaithful, have been deserted by the passions, all except one; and that one has been left as a paramount evil which fully takes the place of all the others, for it is so harmful that it can even cast down from heaven.

63. The spent material of the passions is destroyed by the divine fire. And while this material is being uprooted and the soul purified the passions all retire; that is, if the man himself does not attract them again by worldly habits and indolence.

64. Demons leave us of their own accord so as to lead us to carelessness, and then suddenly carry off our wretched soul.

[1] I.e. all the virtues.

65. I know another way in which those beasts slink off; they go after the soul has thoroughly acquired the habits of vice and is its own betrayer and enemy. Infants are an example of what has been said; for, when weaned from their mother's breasts, from long standing habit they suck their fingers.

66. I know also a fifth kind of spiritual dispassion which comes from great simplicity and praiseworthy innocence. For on such people help is justly bestowed by God who saves the true of heart[1] and imperceptibly rids them of all vice; just as infants, when undressed, are quite unaware of it.

67. Vice or passion is not originally planted in nature, for God is not the Creator of passions. But there are in us many natural virtues from Him, among which are certainly the following: mercy, for even the pagans are compassionate; love, for even dumb animals often weep at the loss of one another; faith, for we all give birth to it of ourselves; hope, for we lend, and sail, and sow, hoping for the best.[2] So if, as has been shown, love is a natural virtue in us, and is the bond[3] and fulfilment of the law,[4] then it follows that the virtues are not far from nature. And those who plead their inability to practise them ought to be ashamed.

68. Above nature are chastity, freedom from anger, humility, prayer, vigil, fasting, constant compunction. Some of them men teach us, others angels, and of others the Teacher and Giver is God the Word Himself.

69. When confronted by evils, we should choose the least. For instance, it often happens that we are standing at prayer, and brothers come to us, and we have to do one of two things: either to stop praying, or to grieve the brother by leaving him without an answer. Love is greater than prayer, because prayer is a particular virtue but love embraces all the virtues.

70. Once long ago, when I was still young, I came to a town or village and while sitting at table I was attacked by thoughts of gluttony and vainglory, both at once. Fearing the offspring of gluttony, I decided that it was better to yield to vainglory, for I knew that in the young the demon of gluttony often conquers the demon of vainglory. And this is not surprising. In people of the world the root of all evil is love of money, but in monks it is gluttony.

71. Often Divine Providence leaves certain slight passions in spiritual people so that by unsparingly condemning themselves for those trifling and venial defects they may obtain that wealth of humility which none can steal.

72. It is impossible for those who have not first lived in obedience to obtain humility; for everyone who has learned an art on his own fancies himself.

73. The Fathers state that the active life consists in two virtues of the most general kind: in fasting and obedience. And rightly, for the first destroys sensuality, and the other reinforces this destruction with humility. That is why mourning also has a double power, for it destroys sin and produces humility.

74. To the pious it is natural to give to everyone who asks; and to the more pious to give even to him who does not ask. But not to demand a thing back from the person who took it, especially when they have the chance, is characteristic perhaps only of the dispassionate.

75. In every passion, and also in the virtues, let us critically examine ourselves: Where are we? At the beginning, or in the middle, or at the end?

76. All the attacks which we suffer from the demons come from these three causes: from sensuality, or from pride, or from the envy of the demons. The last are blessed, the middle are very pitiful, but the first are failures till the end.

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[1] Psalm vii,10.
[2] Another reading is: 'to get rich'.
[3] Cf. Ephesians iv, 3; Colossians iii, 14.
[4] Romans xiii, 10.

77. There is a certain feeling, or rather habit, called endurance of hardship. He who possesses it will never fear pain, labour or hardship or turn aside from such. Upheld by this glorious grace, the souls of the martyrs recklessly despised their tortures.

78. The guarding of the thoughts is one thing, and the custody of the mind is another. As far as the East is from the West[1] so much higher is the latter than the former, even if it is more laborious.

79. It is one thing to pray for deliverance from bad thoughts, another to contradict them, another to despise and disregard them. Of the first way he bears testimony who said: O God, come to my help;[2] of the second, he who said: And to those who reproach me I will make contradictory answer;[3] and again: Thou hast made us a contradiction to our neighbours;[4] of the third the witness is the Psalmist: I was dumb, and opened not my mouth;[5] and: I put a bridle on my mouth, when the sinner was before me;[6] and again: The proud have broken the law to excess, but I have not swerved from Thy contemplation.[7] He who stands on the middle step will often make use of the first of these means through being taken unawares. But he who stands on the first step is not in a position to ward off his enemies by the second means. But he who has reached the third step spurns the demons altogether.

80. Naturally it is impossible for a bodiless being to be confined by a body; but for a person who has God everything is possible.

81. Just as those whose sense of smell is healthy can tell who has hidden perfumes, so the pure soul can recognize in others both the fragrance which he himself has obtained from God and the stench from which he has been freed, though this is imperceptible to others.

82. It is impossible for all to become dispassionate, but it is not impossible for all to be saved and reconciled to God.

83. Take care that you are not mastered by foreigners, those thoughts which urge you to be inquisitive about the ineffable judgments of Divine Providence or the visions that people have which secretly suggest that the Lord is partial. For they are the offspring of self-esteem, and are known as such.

84. There is a demon of avarice which often apes humility; and there is a demon of vainglory, and one of sensuality too, which both urge to almsgiving. However, if we are clear of them both, we should not stint our acts of mercy wherever we are.

85. Some have said that demons work against demons; but I know that they all seek our destruction.

86. Our own strong desire and intention, with God's cooperation, precede every spiritual action both visible and mental; for if the first has not paved the way, the second is apt not to follow.

87. If there is a time for everything under heaven,[8] as the Preacher says, and by the word 'everything' must be understood what concerns our holy life, then if you please let us look into it and let us seek to do at each time what is proper for that occasion. For it is certain that for those who enter the lists there is a time for dispassion (I say this for the combatants who are serving their apprenticeship); there is a time for tears, and a time for hardness of heart; there is a time for obedience, and there is a time to command; there is a time to fast, and a time to partake; there is a time for battle with our enemy the body, and a time when the fire is dead;[9] a time of spiritual storm, and a time of spiritual calm; a time for heartfelt sorrow, and a time for spiritual joy; a time for teaching and a time for listening; a time of

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[1] Psalm cii, 12.
[2] Psalm lxix, 1.
[3] Psalm cxviii, 42.
[4] Psalm lxxix, 7.
[5] Psalm xxxviii, 10.
[6] Psalm xxxviii, 2.
[7] Psalm cxviii, 51.
[8] Ecclesiastes iii, 1.
[9] Lit. 'a time of the death of burning'.

pollutions, perhaps on account of conceit, and a time of cleansing by humility; a time for struggle, and a time for safe relaxation; a time for quiet, and a time for undistracted distraction; a time for unceasing prayer, and a time for sincere service. So let us not be deceived by proud zeal and seek prematurely what will come in its own good time; that is, we should not seek in winter what comes in summer, or at seed time what comes at harvest; because there is a time to sow labours, and a time to reap the unspeakable gifts of grace. Otherwise we shall not receive even in season what is proper to that season.

88. By the ineffable providence of God some have received holy returns for their toiling before their labours, some during their labours, some after labours, and some at the time of their death. It is a question which of them was rendered more humble?

89. There is a despair that is the consequence of a multitude of sins, of a burdened conscience and unbearable sorrow because the soul is covered with a multitude of wounds and it sinks under the burden of them into the depth of despair. And there is another kind of sorrow that comes to us from pride and conceit, when someone considers that he has not deserved a fall that he has had. The observant will find the distinguishing feature of each: the one cooly gives way to indifference, the other in despair still clings to his struggle — which does not accord with his state. The former is cured by temperance and good hope, and the latter by humility and the habit of not judging anyone.

90. It should not surprise us or seem to us strange when we see that some do bad deeds under cover of good words; for perhaps even in Paradise the snake was destroyed by overwhelming conceit.

91. In all your undertakings and in every way of life, whether you are living in obedience, or are not submitting your work to anyone, whether in outward or in spiritual matters, let this be your rule and practice, to ask yourself: Am I really doing this in accordance with God's will? For example, when we, I mean beginners, carry out some task and the humility acquired from this action is not added to our soul, then in my opinion, be the matter great or small, we are not doing it according to God. For in us who are still young in the spiritual life, growth in humility is the fulfilment of the Lord's will; and for those who have reached a middle state perhaps the test is the cessation of inner conflicts; and for the perfect, an increase and abundance of the divine light.

92. Even a small thing can be not small to the great; but to the small, even great things are not altogether perfect.

93. When the air is cleared of clouds, the sun shines brightly; and a soul freed from its former habits and granted forgiveness has certainly seen the divine light.

94. Sin is one thing, idleness another, indifference another, passion another and a fall another. He who is able to investigate this in the Lord, let him seek clearly.

95. Some praise above all the gift of miracle-working and the visible spiritual gifts, not knowing that there are many higher than this which are hidden and which therefore remain secure.

96. He who is perfectly purified sees the soul of his neighbour (although not the actual substance of the soul), and can tell its state. But he who progresses further can judge the state of the soul from the body.

97. A small fire often destroys a whole forest; so too a small flaw spoils all our labour.

98. There is a rest from hostility which awakens the power of the mind without stirring the fire of passion. And there is an exhaustion of the body, which perhaps excites even movements in the flesh so that we should not trust in ourselves,[1] but should trust in God, who, without our knowledge, mortifies the lust living in us.

99. When we see that some love us in the Lord, then we should not allow ourselves to be especially free with them, for nothing is so likely to destroy love and produce hatred as familiarity.

[1] 2 Corinthians i, 9.

100. The eye of the soul is spiritual and extremely beautiful and, next after the incorporeal beings, it surpasses all things. That is why people who are still subject to passions can often know the thoughts in the souls of others on account of their great love for them, and especially when they have not been sunk and defiled by the clay. If nothing is so opposed to immaterial nature as material nature, let him who reads understand.[1]

101. Superstitious observances in the case of lay people are contrary to Divine Providence, and in the case of monks, to spiritual knowledge.

102. Let those who are infirm in soul recognize God's visitation from their bodily circumstances, dangers and outward temptations; but the perfect recognize it from the presence of the Holy Spirit and an accession of spiritual gifts.

103. There is a demon who comes to us when we are lying in bed and shoots at us evil and dirty thoughts to make us shrink from rising for prayer and from taking up arms against it, and makes us fall asleep with these foul thoughts and then have foul dreams too.

104. There is an evil spirit, called the forerunner, who assails us as soon as we awake from sleep and defiles our first thought. Devote the first-fruits of your day to the Lord, because the whole day will belong to whoever gets the first start. It is worth hearing what an expert told me: 'From my morning,' he said, 'I know the course of the whole day.'

105. There are many ways of piety and perdition. That is why it often happens that a way that is unsuitable for one just fits another; and the intention of both is acceptable to the Lord.

106. In all the temptations that happen to us the devils struggle to make us say or do something improper. And if they cannot do that, they stand quietly and suggest that we should offer God arrogant thanksgiving.

107. Those whose minds are on things above, after the separation of soul and body, ascend on high in two parts;[2] but those whose minds are on things below, go below. For souls separated from the body there is no intermediate place. Of all God's creations only the soul has its being in something else (in a body) and not in itself; and it is wonderful how it can exist outside that in which it received being.

108. Pious daughters are born of pious mothers, and the mothers are born of the Lord. And it is not a bad plan to apply this rule in the contrary sense.[3]

109. Moses, or rather God Himself, forbids the coward to go out to battle lest the last spiritual error should be worse than the first bodily fall. And this is right.[4]

The eyes of our body are a light for all the bodily members; and the discernment of the divine virtues is a light for the mind.

On expert discernment

110. As the hart parched by the heat longs for the streams,[5] so monks long for grasp of the good and divine will, and not only that, but also for what is not the pure will of God, and even for what is

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[1] The soul is immaterial. The body is material. Nothing is so opposed to the soul as the body. Nothing so disquiets and blinds the mind as fleshly impurity caused by degrading passions (Romans i, 26). Yet even natural love gives the lover a remarkable insight into the mind and heart of the beloved. Cf. St. Matthew xxiv, 15.

[2] I.e. first the soul, then after the resurrection the body.

[3] He calls mothers the productive virtues which bear their own. And he calls daughters those which are born of the love of God and of faith and of hope. For these are of God just as their opposites are of the enemy. And the vices likewise are productive. And just as the Lord creates the virtues in us, so the devil creates vices.

[4] Deuteronomy xx.

[5] Cf. Psalm xli, 1.

opposed to it. This is a subject that is extremely important for us and not easily explained, namely: which of our affairs should be done at once, without delay, and as soon as possible, according to him who said: Woe to him who puts off from day to day,[1] and from time to time; and again, what should be done with moderation and circumspection, as is advised by him who said: War is a matter for guidance,[2] and again: Let all things be done decently and in order.[3] For it is not for everyone to decide quickly and precisely such fine points. Even the God-bearing David who had the Holy Spirit speaking within him, prayed for this gift and sometimes says: Teach me to do Thy will, for Thou art my God,[4] and sometimes again: Guide me to Thy truth,[5] and again: Make known to me the way I should go, O Lord, for I lift up my soul from all the cares of life and passions, and raise it to Thee.[6]

111. Those who wish to learn the will of the Lord must first mortify their own will. Then, having prayed to God with faith and honest simplicity, and having asked the fathers or even the brothers with humility of heart and no thought of doubt, they should accept their advice as from the mouth of God, even if their advice be contrary to their own view, and even if those consulted are not very spiritual. For God is not unjust, and will not lead astray souls who with faith and innocence humbly submit to the advice and judgment of their neighbour. Even if those who were asked were brute beasts, yet He who speaks is the Immaterial and Invisible One. Those who allow themselves to be guided by this rule without having any doubts are filled with great humility. For if someone expounded his problems on a harp,[7] how much better, do you think, can a rational mind and reasonable soul teach than an inanimate object.

112. On account of self-will many have not accepted the perfect and easy blessing mentioned above, and having tried to discover what was pleasing to the Lord of themselves and in themselves, have handed on to us many and various judgments concerning this matter.

113. Some of those who were seeking the will of God laid aside all attachments; they submitted to the Lord their own thought about this or that inclination of the soul, I mean whether to perform an action or to resist it; they submitted their mind stripped of its own will to Him, offering fervent prayer for a set number of days. In this way they attained to a knowledge of His will, either through the spiritual Mind spiritually communicating with their mind or through the complete disappearance from their soul of their cherished intention.

114. Others on account of the trouble and distractions which attended their undertaking concluded that these disturbances came from God, according to him who said: We wanted to come to you time and again but Satan hindered us.[8]

115. Others, on the contrary, recognized that their action was pleasing to God from its unexpected success, declaring: God co-operates with everyone who deliberately chooses to do good.

116. He who has obtained God within him through illumination, both in actions requiring haste and in actions allowing of delay, is assured of His will by the second way, only without a definite period of time.

117. To waver in one's judgments and to remain in doubt for a long time without assurance is the sign of an unenlightened and ambitious soul.

118. God is not unjust and does not close the door against those who knock with humility.

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[1] Ecciesiasticus v, 7—8.
[2] Proverbs xxiv, 6. Cf. xx, 18.
[3] Corinthians xiv, 40.
[4] Psalm cxlii, 10.
[5] Psalm xxiv, 5.
[6] Psalm cxlii, 8.
[7] Cf. Psalm xlviii, 4.
[8] Thessalonians ii, 18.

119. In all our actions, the intention must be sought from the Lord, whether in those that require haste or in those that require to be postponed. For all actions free from attachment and from all impurity will be imputed to us for good if they have been done especially for the Lord's sake and not for anyone else, even though these deeds are not entirely good.

120. Seeking for what is beyond us has no safe end. The Lord's Judgment about us is unfathomable. By His special providence He often chooses to hide His will from us, knowing that, even if we were to learn it, we should disobey it, and should thereby receive greater punishment.

121. An honest heart is free from the different kinds of distractions which occur and it is safely sailing in the bark of innocence.

122. There are courageous souls who with love and humility of heart throw themselves into tasks that are beyond them; and there are proud hearts who do the same. For our foes often intentionally suggest to us things beyond our powers so that these should cause us to lose heart and leave even what is within our power and make ourselves a great laughing-stock to our enemies.

123. I have seen those who were sick in soul and body who, because of the multitude of their sins, engaged in battles that were beyond them and which they could not continue. I say to such as these that God judges our repentance not by our labours but by our humility.

124. Sometimes upbringing is the cause of great evils, and sometimes company. But often a warped soul is of itself sufficient for its ruin. He who is clear of the first two is free from the third as well. But whoever has the third defect is reprobate everywhere; for there is no place safer than heaven.[1]

125. In the case of those who malevolently dispute with us, whether unbelievers or heretics, we should desist after we have twice admonished them.[2] But in the case of those who wish to learn the truth let us never grow weary in well-doing.[3] However, we should use both opportunities for the establishment of our own heart.[4]

126. The man who despairs of himself when he hears of the supernatural virtues of the saints is most unreasonable. On the contrary, they teach you supremely one of two things: either they rouse you to emulation by their holy courage, or they lead you by way of thrice-holy humility to deep self-contempt and realization of your inherent weakness.

127. Amongst the impure evil demons, there are some more evil than others. They suggest to us that we should not commit sin alone, but they counsel us to have others as companions in evil in order to make our punishment more severe. I have seen one learning a bad habit from another, and although he who taught came to his senses and began to repent and gave up doing wrong, his repentance was ineffectual on account of the influence of his pupil.

128. Stupendous, truly stupendous and incomprehensible is the wickedness of the evil spirits. It is not seen by many, and I think that even those few see it only in part. Thus, how is it that while living in luxury and plenty we keep vigil and do not sleep, and why while fasting and exhausting ourselves with labours are we pitifully overpowered by drowsiness? Or why does our heart become hard while abiding in silence? And why, while sitting among our companions, do we come to compunction? When we are hungry why are we tempted by dreams? Yet when sated we do not experience these temptations. In poverty we become dark and incapable of compunction; but if we drink wine we are happy and easily come to compunction. He who can do so in the Lord, let him bring light to the unenlightened in this matter. For we are not enlightened about this. At least we can say that such a change does not always come from the demons. And this sometimes happens to me, I know not how,

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[1] Yet the devil fell from heaven.

[2] Titus iii, 10.

[3] Galatians vi, 9.

[4] Cf. Hebrews xiii, 9.

by reason of the constitution I have been given and the sordid and greedy corpulence with which I am girt about.

129. With regard to the changes enumerated above, so hard to interpret, let us sincerely and humbly pray to the Lord. And if after prayer and the time which it took we still feel the same thing at work in us, then let us conclude that this is caused not by demons but by nature. Yet it often pleases Divine Providence to benefit us through adversity and to check our conceit by all possible means.

130. It is dangerous to be inquisitive about the depth of the divine judgments, because the inquisitive sail in the ship of conceit.

131. Someone asked one of those who could see: 'Why does God, who foresees their falls, adorn some with gifts and wonder-working powers?' And he replied: 'In order to make other Spiritual men more careful, and to demonstrate the freedom of the human will, and to cause those who fall to be without any excuse at the last judgment.'

132. The law, being imperfect, says: Attend to yourself.[1] But the Lord, being entirely perfect, enjoined upon us the correction of our brother, saying: If thy brother sin against thee,[2] and so on. If your reprimand, or rather your reminder, is pure and humble, you should not refuse to carry out the Lord's behest, and especially in the case of those who accept correction. But if you have not yet got as far as this, then at least practise the precept laid down by the law.

133. Do not be surprised when you see that those whom you love turn against you on account of your rebukes. Frivolous people are the tools of the demons, and especially against the demons' foes.

134. One thing about us astonishes me very much: Why do we so quickly and easily incline to the passions when we have Almighty God, angels and saints, to help us towards the virtues, and only the wicked demon against us? I do not wish to speak about this in more detail; in fact, I cannot.

135. If all created substances keep to their nature, then why, as the great Gregory says,[3] am I, the image of God, compounded with clay? If some of God's creatures have somehow lost their created nature, it is certain that they will continually strive to return to their original state. Man ought to use every means to raise his clay, so to speak, and seat it on the throne of God. And let no one make excuses for not undertaking this ascent, because the way and the door are open.

136. It excites the mind and soul to emulation to hear the spiritual feats of the Fathers, and their zealous admirers are led to imitate them through listening to their teaching.

137. Discernment is a light in darkness, the return of wanderers to the way, the illumination of those whose sight is dim. A discerning man finds health and destroys sickness.

138. All who show surprise at every trifle do so for two reasons: either from crass ignorance, or else they magnify and exalt the deeds of their neighbour with a view to humility.

139. Let us make an effort not only to wrestle with the demons but also to wage war on them. The former sometimes throws them, and is sometimes thrown;[4] but the latter is continuously hounding the foe.[5]

140. He who has conquered the passions wounds the demons; by pretending that he still has passions he deceives his foes and remains unassailable. One of the brethren once suffered disgrace and without being in the least moved in his heart he prayed in his mind. Then he began to bewail the disgrace, hiding his dispassion by passion. Another of the brethren who had no longings at all for the office of

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[1] Deuteronomy iv, 9.

[2] St. Matthew xviii, 15.

[3] St. Gregory Nazianzen, *Or*. 16.

[4] I.e. he who merely wrestles with them.

[5] I.e. he who really wages war against them.

superior pretended that he was working for this. And how am I to describe the chastity of that man who went into a brothel ostensibly for the sake of sin, but drew the harlot to the ascetic life? Again, a bunch of grapes was brought very early in the morning to one of the hermits, and after the person who brought them had gone, he ate them with a semblance of gobbling but without any pleasure, to make it seem to the demons that he was a glutton. Another, having lost a few palm-leaves,[1] spent all day pretending that he was grieved about this. Such people need to take care, otherwise in trying to fool the demons they may end by being fooled themselves. It was of these, no doubt, that the Apostle said: As deceivers and yet true.[2]

141. He who wishes to present his body pure to Christ and to show Him a clean heart must carefully preserve chastity and freedom from anger, for without these our labour is quite useless.

142. Just as eyes have different coloured lights in them, so in the soul many different overshadowings of the spiritual Sun occur. One kind comes through bodily tears, another through the tears of the soul; one kind through what is contemplated by the bodily eyes, another through the spiritual. One kind comes from hearing words, another is the joy that spontaneously springs up in the soul; also there is one kind that comes from silence, and another which by rapture ineffably and unexpectedly transports the mind in spiritual light to Christ.

143. There are virtues, and there are mothers of virtues. So a wise man strives rather to obtain the latter. The Teacher of the mother-virtues is God Himself through His own action, while there are plenty of teachers for the daughter-virtues.

144. Let us beware lest we compensate austerity in taking food by excess of sleep, and vice versa; for such behaviour is characteristic of foolish men.

145. I have seen toilers[3] who for some reason slightly indulged their stomachs, but soon after this, these courageous ascetics chastised their poor stomachs by standing throughout the night, and in this way they taught them to be well content to refrain from satiety.

146. The demon of avarice strives fiercely against those who possess nothing, and when it cannot vanquish them it reminds them of the state of the poor and persuades those who are spiritual to become material again.

147. In times of despondency never fail to bear in mind the Lord's commandment to Peter to forgive a person who sins seventy times seven.[4] For He who gave this command to another will Himself do far more. But when we are exalted let us again remember the saying: He who shall keep the whole spiritual law, and yet stumble in one passion, that is, fall into pride, has become guilty of all.[5]

148. There exist certain dispositions of wicked and envious spirits which voluntarily leave the saints so as to deprive those who battle of any chance of obtaining crowns for victory over them.

149. Blessed are the peacemakers.[6] No one will deny this. But I have also seen enemy-makers who are blessed. A certain two developed impure affection for one another. But one of the discerning fathers, a most experienced man, was the means whereby they came to hate each other, by setting one against the other, telling each that he was being slandered by the other. And this wise man by human roguery succeeded in parrying the devil's malice and in producing hatred by which the impure affection was dissolved.

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[1] Palm-leaves were used for making baskets.

[2] 2 Corinthians vi, 8.

[3] I.e. workers for Christ, spiritual athletes, or ascetics.

[4] St. Matthew xviii, 22.

[5] James ii, 10.

[6] St. Matthew v, 9.

150. Some set aside one commandment for the sake of another commandment. I have seen young men who were attached to one another in a right spirit. Yet in order not to offend other men's consciences, by mutual agreement they kept apart for a time.

151. Just as a marriage and a funeral are the very opposite of each other, so too are pride and despair. But as a result of the confusion caused by the demons it is possible to see the two together.

152. At the beginning of the monastic life some of the unclean demons instruct us in the interpretation of the Divine Scriptures. And they are particularly fond of behaving in this way in the case of vainglorious people and of those who have been educated in secular studies so that by gradually deceiving them they may lead them into heresy and blasphemy. We can recognize this diabolical divinity, or rather, devilry, by the disturbances and the confused and unholy joy which are felt in the soul during the instruction.

153. All creatures have received from the Creator their order of being and their beginning, and some their end too. But the end of virtue is infinite. For the Psalmist says: I have seen the end of all perfection, but Thy commandment is exceedingly broad and boundless.[1] If some good ascetics pass from the strength of action to the strength[2] of contemplation, and if love never ceases,[3] and if the Lord will guard the coming in of your fear and the going out[4] of your love, then from this it follows that there is actually no limit to love. We shall never cease to advance in it, either in the present or in the future life, continually adding light to light. And however strange what I have said may seem to many, nevertheless it shall be said. According to the testimonies we have given, I would say, blessed Father, even the spiritual beings (i.e. the angels) do not lack progress; on the contrary, they ever add glory to glory, and knowledge to knowledge.

154. Do not be astonished if the demons often suggest to us good thoughts, and intellectual arguments against them. The aim of our foes in this case is to make us believe that they also know the thoughts of our hearts.

155. Do not judge too severely those who are eloquent in preaching but do not support this in practice, for the profit of a word has often compensated for the dearth of deeds. We do not all obtain everything in equal measure. With some speech takes precedence over action, but with others the latter transcends the former.

156. God is not the cause or the creator of evil, and those who say that certain passions are natural to the soul have been deceived not knowing that we have turned the constituent qualities of nature into passions. For instance, nature gives us the seed for childbearing, but we have perverted this into fornication. Nature provides us with the means of showing anger against the serpent but we have used this against our neighbour. Nature inspires us with zeal to make us compete for the virtues, but we compete in evil. It is natural for the soul to desire glory, but the glory on high. It is natural to be overbearing, but against the demons. Joy is also natural to us, but a joy on account of the Lord and the welfare of our neighbour. Nature has also given us resentment, but to be used against the enemies of the soul. We have received a desire for pleasure,[5] but not for profligacy.

157. An energetic soul rouses the demons against itself. But as our conflicts increase, so do our crowns. He who has never been struck by the enemy will certainly not be crowned. But the warrior who does not flinch despite his incidental falls will be glorified by the angels as a champion.

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[1] Psalm cxviii, 96.
[2] Psalm lxxxiii, 8.
[3] I Corinthians xiii, 8.
[4] Psalm cxxviii.
[5] Another reading is 'food'.

158. He who spent three nights in the earth returned to life for ever,[1] and he who has conquered three hours will never die.[2]

159. Divine providence causes the sun to rise in us for our edification, and then for a time to set,[3] and then He makes darkness His hiding place,[4] and night falls, in which prowl the fierce young lions, which had previously left us and all the beasts of the forest of thorny passions, roaring to snatch the hope that is in us, and seeking from God their food of passions either in thought or in action. And again through the darkness of humility the sun rises upon us and the wild beasts gather together and lie down in their dens,[5] that is to say in sensual hearts, but not in us. Then the demons say amongst themselves: The Lord has done great things for them. And we say to them: The Lord has done great things for us, and we are glad[6] but you are banished. Behold, the Lord rides on a swift cloud, no doubt the soul that is raised above all earthly desire, and comes into Egypt, into the heart already darkened, and will shatter the idols of man's making,[7] that is, vain thoughts of the mind.

160. If Christ, although omnipotent, as man fled bodily from Herod, then let the rash learn not to hurl themselves into temptations. For it is said: Let not thy foot be moved, nor him (the angel) who keeps thee slumber.[8]

161. Vanity or conceit twines itself round courage just as bindweed twines round cypress.

162. Let us constantly guard against admitting even the mere thought that we have attained to any good whatsoever; and let us keep on looking carefully to see whether this is one of our characteristics. If it is, then we shall know that we have utterly failed.

163. Look unceasingly for evidence of the passions, and then you will find many of them in you which we are unable to distinguish in our diseased condition, by reason of our own weakness or because they are so deeply rooted.

164. God is the judge of our intentions; but in His love He does also require us to act as far as we are able. Great is he who leaves undone nothing that is within his power; but greater is he who humbly attempts what is beyond his power.

165. The demons often hinder us from carrying through what is easy and profitable for us, and they urge us to turn to what is more laborious instead.

166. I find that Joseph is honoured for avoiding the occasion of sin, and not for showing dispassion. It may be asked: From what and from how many sins does aversion merit a crown? For it is one thing to turn away from the shadow, but it is a much greater thing to run towards the sun of righteousness.

167. Being in darkness is a cause of stumbling; stumbling is a cause of a fall; and to fall is a cause of death.

168. Those who have been overcome by wine often wash with water, but those who have been overcome by passions wash with tears.

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[1] St. Matthew xii, 40.

[2] By three hours (according to Elias of Crete) is meant three kinds, three periods of temptation: first, ambition or love of glory; second, sensuality or love of pleasure; and third, cupidity or love of money (i.e. world, flesh, devil).

[3] Psalm ciii, 19.

[4] Psalm xvii, 12.

[5] Psalm ciii, 20-3.

[6] Psalm cxxv, 3-4.

[7] Isaiah xix, 1.

[8] Psalm cxx, 3.

169. Pollution is one thing, darkness is another, and blindness another. The first is cured by temperance, the second by solitude, and the third by obedience and by God who for our sakes became obedient.[1]

170. We can take as an example two places in which mundane things are cleaned. Let us picture to ourselves by analogy two sublime institutions for those who set their mind on things above;[2] a monastic community such as is pleasing to God is like the laundry in which uncleanness, grossness and deformity of soul are scoured out; and the dye-works will be the solitary life for those who have already laid aside lust, remembrance of wrongs and anger, and who are now passing from the monastery to solitude.

171. Some say that we fall into the same sins because we have been unable to correct our former sins through the inadequacy of our repentance. But it may be asked: Have all those who have not fallen into the same kind of sin really repented as they should? Some fall into the same sins either because they have sunk into a deep forgetfulness of their former sins, or because they imagine in their own pleasure-loving way that God is merciful, or they have lost all hope of their own salvation. I do not know whether anyone will blame me if I say that their trouble arises because they have not been strong enough to bind the foe who is dominating them through the tyranny of habit.

172. We should inquire why the soul which is incorporeal does not see of what nature the spirits are that take up their abode with it. Is it not a result of its union with the flesh? This is known only to Him who joined them.

173. A discerning man once asked me: 'Tell me, tell me, for I desire to know which of the spirits are liable to depress the mind when we sin and which of them to lift it up?' But I was embarrassed by the question, and on oath I affirmed my ignorance. Then he who wished to learn taught me himself, saying: 'I shall give you in a few words the leaven of discernment, and then I shall leave you to seek the rest by your own industry. The spirit of lust, the spirit of anger, the spirit of gluttony, the spirit of despondency the spirit of sleepiness have no tendency to lift up the horn of the mind. But the spirit of love of money, ambition, talkativeness and many others add evil to evil. That is why the spirit of criticism is near to the latter.'

174. If any monk has spent an hour or a day in visiting people in the world, or has had them as guests, he ought to rejoice when he parts from them like someone who has been freed from a clog and a trap. But if on the contrary he feels the dart of sorrow, this indicates that he has become the toy either of vainglory or of lust.

175. We ought to begin by seeing which way the wind is blowing, and then we shall not set our sails against it.

176. Comfort with love and allow a little respite to old men practised in charity, such as have exhausted their bodies in asceticism. But compel young men who have exhausted their souls with sins to be abstinent, and bring to their memory the eternal torments.

177. It is quite impossible, as I said in another place, suddenly to become perfectly free from gluttony and vainglory at the outset of the monastic life. But we should not fight vainglory with luxury, because victory over gluttony, I mean in beginners, gives rise to vainglory. Rather let us master it by frugality. For the hour will come, and is already here for those who desire it, when the Lord will also subdue this passion under our feet.

178. When they enter monastic life the young and the aged are not afflicted by the same passions, because they often have quite opposite infirmities Therefore, blessed, truly blessed is humility, because it makes repentance safe and effective for young and old alike.

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[1] Philippians ii, 8.
[2] Colossians iii, 2.

179. Do not make an uproar at what I am going to say There are indeed true and upright souls, though they are rare, who are strangers to malice, hypocrisy and mischief, for whom living with men is completely uncongenial. But with the help of their guide, from solitude as from a harbour, they can ascend to heaven without desiring or experiencing the disturbances and stumbling blocks of community life.

180. Men can cure the lustful, angels the malicious, but only God the proud.

181. Perhaps one aspect of love often consists in letting the neighbour who is a frequent visitor do what he likes, and in any case showing him all our kindness.

182. It may be asked: How and to what extent, when and whether good is destroyed by a kind of repentance[1] in the same way as evil.

183. We must use great discernment in order to know when to take our stand against sin, and in what cases and to what extent to struggle against the food of the passions, and when to withdraw from the fray. For, on account of our weakness, sometimes it is necessary to acknowledge that flight is better than death.

184. We should watch and see when and how we can empty out our gall by malice. Some of the demons uplift us, some depress us, some harden, some comfort, some darken, some pretend to communicate enlightment to us, some make us slothful, some make us cunning, some make us sad, and some cheerful.

185. We should not be dismayed if we find that our passions are stronger at the beginning of our monastic life than they were in our life in the world. For we have to remove the causes of sickness, and then health will come to us. The beasts were there in hiding all the time, only they did not show themselves.

186. When by some accident those who are otherwise approaching perfection are overcome by the demons in a trivial matter, they should at once use all means in their power to wrench this fault out of them again a hundredfold.

187. As the winds in calm weather ruffle only the surface of the sea, but at other times they stir the depths as well, so you can imagine to yourself the dark winds of iniquity. For in those enslaved by passions they shake the actual consciousness of the heart, but in those who have already made progress they only ruffle the surface of the mind. That is why the latter soon feel their normal calm, for the heart was left undefiled.

188. It is the privilege of the perfect to know unerringly whether a thought in the soul comes from their own consciousness, or from God, or from the demons; for the demons do not at first suggest everything that is repugnant. This is indeed a dark problem and hard to solve.

189. The body is enlightened by its two corporeal eyes; but in visible and spiritual discernment the eyes of the heart are illumined.

Brief summary of all the previous steps

1. Firm faith is the mother of renunciation. The opposite of this is self-evident.
2. Unwavering hope is the door to detachment. The opposite of this is self-evident.
3. Love of God is the foundation of exile. The opposite is self-evident.
4. Obedience is born of self-condemnation and desire for health.

[1] Or, 'regret'. The question proposed is whether a change of mind and purpose for the worse destroys our virtues just as a change for the better destroys our vices.

5. Temperance[1] is the mother of health. The mother of temperance is the thought of death and firm remembrance of our Lord's gall and vinegar.

6. The helper and foundation of chastity is solitude. The quenching of fleshly burning is fasting. The adversary of shameful thoughts is contrition of heart.

7. Faith and exile are the death of cupidity. But compassion and love betray the body.

8. Unflagging prayer is the ruin of despondency. Remembrance of the judgment is a means of fervour.

9. Love of indignity is a cure for anger. Hymnody, compassion and poverty are the suffocation of sorrow.

10. Detachment from things of the senses is contemplation of spiritual things.

11. Quietness and solitude are the foes of vainglory. And if you are amongst people, seek dishonour.

12. Visible pride is cured by grim conditions, but invisible pride can be healed only by Him who is eternally Invisible.[2]

13. The deer is a destroyer of all visible snakes, but humility destroys spiritual ones.[3]

14. By means of what is natural we can be trained to a clear conception of the spiritual.

15. As a snake cannot strip itself of its old skin unless it crawls into a tight hole, neither can we shed our old prejudices, our oldness of soul and the garment of the old man unless we go by the strait and narrow way of fasting and dishonour.

16. It is just as impossible for the person who nourishes and panders to his flesh to fly to heaven as it is for an overfed bird.

17. Dried up mire offers no attraction for swine, and in exhausted flesh demons no longer find anywhere to rest.

18. As too many sticks often choke a fire and put it out, while making a lot of smoke, so excessive sorrow often makes the soul smoky and dark, and dries the stream of tears.

19. As a blind man is no use as an archer, so a contradictory pupil is a lost one.

20. As tempered iron can sharpen untempered, so a fervent brother has often saved an indolent one.

21. As eggs that are warmed in dung hatch out, so (bad) thoughts that are not confessed hatch out and proceed to action.

22. As galloping horses race one another, so a good community excites mutual fervour.

23. Just as clouds hide the sun, so evil thoughts darken and ruin the mind.

24. As the man under sentence who is going to execution will not talk about theatres, so he who truly weeps for himself will never gratify his stomach.

25. When poor men see the royal treasury they are still more conscious of their poverty, and so too when the soul reads about the great virtues of the Fathers it at least comes to a more humble frame of mind.

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[1] Or, 'self-control', 'abstinence', 'continence'.

[2] The meaning is that God uses slights, setbacks, rebuffs and other circumstances to strip us of ordinary pride, but spiritual pride requires a special act of divine intervention.

[3] Cf. Step 25:8. The comparison of humility with a deer or stag is taken from ancient writers who allege that deer sense the presence of snakes and then stand over the hole and draw the reptile out by their breath. When the snake crawls out, they swallow it; but this causes such a thirst that unless they find water within about three hours, they die. Hence David says that his soul thirsts for God like a deer for water.

26. As steel is attracted to the magnet even without meaning to be, for it is drawn by an inexplicable force of nature, so he who has contracted sinful habits is tyrannized by them.

27. As oil tames the sea, even though it is reluctant to do this, so fasting quenches the involuntary burnings of the body.

28. As a dammed stream of water rushes upwards, so often the soul that is pressed by dangers ascends to God and is saved through penitence.

29. As he who carries perfumes with him makes his presence felt by the fragrance whether he wants to or not, so he who has the Spirit of the Lord is known by his words and his humility.

30. As the sun makes gold glitter, so virtue singles out the man who possesses it.[1]

31. As winds stir the deep, so temper disturbs the mind more than anything else.

32. As mere hearsay does not provoke violent desire to taste what the eye has not seen, so those who are chaste in body get great relief through their ignorance.

33. Just as thieves will not attack a place where they see royal weapons lying, so he who has knit his heart to prayer will not lightly be raided by spiritual thieves.

34. As fire does not give birth to snow, so those who seek honour here will not enjoy it there (in heaven).

35. As one spark has frequently set fire to much wood, so it has been found that one good deed can wipe out a multitude of great sins.[2]

36. As it is impossible to destroy a wild beast without a weapon, so without humility it is impossible to obtain freedom from anger.

37. As by nature we cannot live without food, so up to the very moment of our death we cannot, even for a second, give way to negligence.

38. As a ray of sun, passing through a crack, lights everything in the house and shows up even the finest dust, so the fear of the Lord, entering a man's heart, reveals to him all his sins.

39. Crabs are easily caught because they walk sometimes forwards, sometimes backwards. So the soul that now laughs, now mourns, now lives in luxury, can make no progress.

40. The drowsy are easily robbed, and so are those who seek virtue near the world.

41. A man who is fighting a lion is lost the moment he takes his eye off it, and so is the man who, while fighting his flesh, gives it any respite.

42. As he who climbs up a rotten ladder runs a risk, so all honour, glory and authority oppose humility and bring down him who has them.

43. As it is impossible for a starving man not to think of bread, so it is impossible for a man eager to be saved not to think of death and judgment.

44. As writing is washed out by water, so sins can be washed out by tears.

45. As some, for lack of water, blot out writing by other means, so there are souls who have no tears, but pound out and scour away their sins by sorrow, sighing and great heaviness of heart.

46. As a mass of dung breeds a mass of worms, so a surfeit of food breeds a surfeit of falls, and evil thoughts, and dreams.

47. As a blind man cannot see to walk, so a lazy man can neither see good nor do it.

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[1] St. Matthew v, 14.

[2] James iii, 5; v, 20.

48. As he whose legs are tied cannot walk freely, so those who hoard money cannot ascend to heaven.

49. As a fresh wound is easily cured, so the opposite is true of those suffering from chronic wounds of the soul; if they are healed, they are healed with difficulty.

50. As a dead man cannot walk, so a despairing man cannot be saved.

51. He who says he has true faith yet continues to sin is like a man who has no eyes in his face. But he who has no faith, even though he may do some good, is like a man who draws water and pours it into a barrel with holes in it.

52. As a ship which has a good helmsman comes safely into harbour with God's help, so the soul which has a good shepherd, even though it has done much evil, easily ascends to heaven.

53. Without a guide it is easy to wander from the road, however prudent you may be, and so he who walks the monastic way under his own direction soon perishes, even though he may have all the wisdom of the world.

54. If anyone is weak in body and has had some grave falls, he should take the road of humility and the qualities that belong to her, for he will find no other way to salvation.

55. As one who has suffered a prolonged illness can scarcely obtain health in an instant, so it is impossible suddenly to overcome the passions, or even one passion.

56. Keep track of the extent of every passion and of every virtue, and you will know what progress you are making.

57. As those who exchange gold for clay are the losers, so are those who discuss and divulge the spiritual for material gain.

58. Many have soon obtained forgiveness, but no one has obtained dispassion quickly; this needs considerable time, and love, and longing, and God.

59. Let us find out which particular beasts and birds try to harm us at the time of sowing, and at the time when the seed shoots, and at the time of harvest, so as to set our traps accordingly.

60. Just as a man with fever has no right to commit suicide, so till our very last breath we must never give up hope.

61. As it is irreverent for a man who has just buried his father to go from the funeral straight on to his wedding, so for those who are mourning over their falls it is not proper to seek from men in this present life either honour, or rest, or glory.

62. As citizens have one kind of dwelling and convicts another, so the needs of those who are mourning ought to be quite different from those of the innocent.

63. Just as a king orders a soldier who has received serious wounds in battle in his presence not to be dismissed from his service but rather to be promoted, so the Heavenly King crowns the monk who endures many perils from demons.

64. Spiritual perception is a property of the soul itself, but sin is a buffeting of perception. Conscious perception produces either the cessation or lessening of evil; and it is the offspring of conscience. And conscience is the word and conviction of our guardian angel given to us from the time of baptism. That is why we find that the unbaptized do not feel such keen pangs of remorse in their soul for their bad deeds.

65. The lessening of evil breeds abstinence from evil; and abstinence from evil is the beginning of repentance; and the beginning of repentance is the beginning of salvation; and the beginning of salvation is a good intention; and a good intention is the mother of labours. And the beginning of labours is the virtues; the beginning of the virtues is a flowering, and the flowering of virtue is the beginning of activity. And the offspring of virtue is perseverance; and the fruit and offspring of

persevering practice is habit, and the child of habit is character. Good character is the mother of fear; and fear gives birth to the keeping of commandments in which I include both heavenly and earthly. The keeping of the commandments is a sign of love; and the beginning of love is an abundance of humility; and an abundance of humility is the daughter of dispassion; and the acquisition of the latter is the fullness of love, that is to say the perfect indwelling of God in those who through dispassion are pure in heart. For they shall see God.[1] And to Him the glory for all eternity. Amen.

Step 27

On holy solitude[2] of body and soul.

1. We are like bought serfs under contract to unholy passions; we therefore know to some extent the whims, ways, will and wiles of the spirits that rule over our poor souls. But there are others who through the action of the Holy Spirit, and by reason of their liberation from the rule of those spirits, are fully alive to their tricks. The former, being in a painful state of sickness, can only guess about the relief which would come with good health; while the latter, being in a healthy condition, are able to form ideas and draw conclusions about the miseries attendant on sickness. That is why we, who are weak and infirm, hesitate to philosophize in our discourse about the haven of solitude, for we know that at the table of the good brotherhood there is always some cur watching to snatch from it a piece of bread, that is, a soul, and it then runs off with it in its mouth and devours it on the quiet. We do not want our discourse to give room to that dog, and an opportunity to those who are looking for opportunities, and for this reason we do not consider it permissible to talk about peace to the courageous warriors of our King who are struggling in the battle. We will simply remark that crowns of peace and calm are woven for those who do not flag in the fight. But we do not want to grieve anyone by speaking of other things without even mentioning this, and so we shall, if you wish, speak briefly about solitude, if only in order to explain what it is.

2. Solitude of the body is the knowledge and reduction to order of the habits and feelings. And solitude of soul is the knowledge of one's thoughts and an inviolable mind.

3. A friend of solitude is a courageous and unrelenting power of thought which keeps constant vigil at the doors of the heart and kills or repels the thoughts that come. He who is solitary in the depth of his heart will understand this last remark; but he who is still a child is unaware and ignorant of it.

4. A discerning solitary[3] will have no need of words, because he expresses words by deeds.

5. The beginning of solitude is to throw off all noise as disturbing for the depth (of the soul). And the end of it is not to fear disturbances and to remain insusceptible to them. Though going out, yet without a word, he is kind and wholly a house of love. He is not easily moved to speech, nor is he moved to anger. The opposite of this is obvious.

6. A solitary is he who strives to confine his incorporeal being within his bodily house,[4] paradoxical as this is.

7. The cat keeps hold of her mouse, and the thought of the solitary holds his spiritual mouse. Do not call this example rubbish; if you do, then you do not yet know what solitude means.

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[1] St. Matthew v, 8.
[2] Gr. hēsychia, i.e. 'quiet' or 'contemplation'; this has usually been translated as 'solitude'.
[3] I.e. a hesychast, a contemplative, one who lives in solitude or holy quiet.
[4] I.e. to shut up in his body, as in a house, all the powers of the soul: thought, imagination, desire, etc.

8. A monk living with another monk is not saved as a solitary monk would be. When a monk is alone he has need of great vigilance and of an unwandering mind. When not alone, the other often helps his brother; but an angel assists the solitary.

9. The celestial powers unite in worship with him whose soul is quiet, and dwell lovingly with him. And the opposite to this is obvious.

10. The depth of the dogmas is profound, and the mind of the solitary does not caper among them without risk.[1]

11. It is not safe to swim in one's clothes, nor should a slave of passion touch theology.

12. The cell of the solitary is the confines of his body; he has within a shrine of knowledge.

13. He who is sick in soul from some passion and attempts solitude is like a man who has jumped from a ship into the sea and thinks that he will reach the shore safely on a plank.

14. For all who are struggling with their clay, solitude is suitable at the right time if only they have a director. For angelic strength is needed for the solitary life. I speak of those who lead a life of real solitude of body and soul.

15. The solitary who has become lazy will tell lies, urging people by hints to end his solitude for him. And having left his cell, he blames the devils. He has not discovered that he is his own devil.

16. I have seen solitaries who insatiably nourished their flaming desire for God, generating fire by fire, love by love, desire by desire.

17. The solitary is an earthly image of an angel who with the paper of love and letters of zeal has freed his prayer from sloth and negligence. The solitary is he who openly declares: O God, my heart is ready.[2] The solitary is he who says: I sleep, but my heart is awake.[3]

18. Shut the door of your cell to your body, the door of your tongue to speech, and the inner gate to evil spirits.

19. The patience of the sailor is tested in the midday heat or when he is becalmed; and the lack of necessaries tries out the perseverance of the solitary. When the one gets discouraged he swims in the water, and when the other gets despondent he mixes with crowds.

20. Do not fear noisy trifles, for mourning[4] does not know cowardice and is not scared by them.

21. Those whose mind has learned true prayer converse with the Lord face to face, as if speaking into the ear of the Emperor. Those who make vocal prayer fall down before Him as if in the presence of the whole senate. But those who live in the world petition the Emperor amidst the clamour of all the crowds. If you have learned the art of prayer scientifically, you cannot fail to know what I have said.

22. Take up your seat on a high place and watch, if only you know how, and then you will see in what manner, when, whence, how many and what kind of thieves come to enter and steal your clusters of grapes.

23. When the watchman grows weary he stands up and prays; and then he sits down again and courageously takes up his former task.

24. One who had learnt about this from experience wanted to tell others about it exactly and in detail, but he was afraid in case he should damp the enthusiasm of those already practising it, or frighten off with the noise of his words those who were making up their minds to embark upon it.

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[1] Variant reading: 'and the mind of the solitary jumps over them safely'.

[2] Psalm lvi, 8.

[3] Song of Songs v, 2.

[4] Or, 'penitence'. Cf. St. Matthew v, 4.

25. He who goes into subtle and learned discussions on solitude stirs up demons against himself, for he has no one else to hold up their indecencies to contempt.

26. He who has attained to solitude has penetrated to the very depth of the mysteries, but he would never have descended into the deep unless he had first seen and heard the noise of the waves and the evil spirits, and perhaps even been splashed by these waves. The great Apostle Paul confirms what we have said. If he had not been caught up into Paradise, as into solitude, he could never have heard the unspeakable words.[1] The ear of the solitary will receive from God amazing words. That is why in the book of Job that all-wise man said: 'Will not my ear receive amazing things from Him?'[2]

27. The solitary is one who runs away from all company though without hatred, just as others run towards it though without enthusiasm. He wishes to go on receiving the divine sweetness.

28. Go and distribute immediately (because to sell would take a long time) all that thou hast, and give to the poor[3] monks, so that in their prayers they may accompany you to solitude. And take up thy cross, and carry it with the help of obedience, and vigorously bear the burden of the loss of thy will, and for the future come and follow Me[4] to union with most blessed solitude, and I will teach you the visible activity and life of the spiritual powers. They never weary of praising their Maker to all eternity, and he who ascends to the heaven of solitude never ceases to praise his Creator. Immaterial spirits will not think about the material, nor will those who have become immaterial in a material body think about food. The first will not be aware of food, and the second will need no promise of it. The former do not think about money and possessions, nor do the latter think about the malice of the evil spirits. Those in heaven above have no desire for the visible creation, and those here on earth below have no desire for things perceived by the senses. The former will never cease to advance in love, and the latter vie with them daily. Those are well aware of the wealth of their progress, and these are conscious of their love of the ascent. Those will not stop until they reach seraphic perfection, and these will not weary until they become angels. Blessed is he who hopes; thrice-blessed is he who has the promise; but he who has the reality is an angel.

Different aspects of solitude and how to distinguish them

29. In all the sciences, as everyone knows, there are differences of opinion and aim. For everything is not perfect in all, either from want of industry or from lack of strength. Therefore some enter this harbour,[5] or rather this sea, or perhaps this abyss, because they lack control of their tongue or because of a past habit of the body; others because they are without control of their temper and the poor wretches cannot overcome this in crowded society; others because out of conceit they have judged it better to sail at their own discretion than under direction; others because amidst material things they cannot abstain from such; some with the intention of cultivating zeal by solitude; others to torment themselves secretly for their faults; and some in order to acquire glory for themselves from it; others again (if only the Son of Man when He comes may find such on earth) are wedded to holy solitude out of a delightful thirst for the love and sweetness of God, but they do not achieve this union before they have divorced all despondency; because fellowship with despondency would seem like adultery to anyone who is united with God.

30. As far as my meagre knowledge permits (for I am like an unskilled architect) I have constructed a ladder of ascent. Let each look to see on which step he is standing: Is it self-will, or human glory, or weakness of tongue, or hot temper, or too great attachment? Is it to atone for faults, or to grow more

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[1] 2 Corinthians xii, 4.
[2] Job iv, 12-18.
[3] St. Matthew xix, 21.
[4] Matthew xvi, 24.
[5] I.e. of solitude or contemplation.

zealous, or to add fire to fire? The last shall be first, and the first last. The first seven are the activities of this world's week, some acceptable, and some unacceptable. But the eighth clearly bears the seal of the world to come.

31. Watch, solitary monk, be vigilant at the times when wild beasts prowl; otherwise you will not be able to adapt your snares to them. If despondency which you have divorced has completely left you, then the task will be superfluous. But if she still puts herself forward, then I do not know how you can live in solitude.

32. Why did the holy fathers of Tabennisi never have so many lights[1] as those of the Scete? Understand this who can. I cannot speak, or rather, I do not wish to.[2]

33. Some diminish the passions, others sing psalms and spend most of their time in prayer, while some apply themselves to contemplation, and live their life in profound contemplation. Let the question be investigated after the manner of the ladder. He who is able to receive this, let him receive it in the Lord.[3]

34. There are idle souls living in monasteries, and by indulging in what nourishes their idleness they come to complete ruin. But there are also souls who through living with others strip themselves of their idleness. And the same thing often occurs not only with the careless, but with the zealous too.

35. We can apply this same rule to solitude. For it is true that many whom the solitary life has received as experienced it has rejected for wilfulness, convicting them of desire to please themselves; while others who have come to this way of life have been more zealous and fervent through fear and anxiety about the condemnation that they will have to bear.

36. He who is still troubled by bad temper and conceit, by hypocrisy and remembrance of wrongs, should never dare to set foot in the solitary way, lest he gain distraction and nothing else. But if anyone is clear of these, he will know what is best—and yet I think, perhaps not even he.

37. Here are the signs, courses and proofs of those who are practising solitude in the right way: an unruffled mind, sanctified thought, rapture towards the Lord, recollection of eternal torments, the urgency of death, constant hunger for prayer, unsleeping vigilance, wasting away of lust, ignorance of attachment, death to the world, loss of gluttony, a sure understanding of divine things, a well of discernment, a truce accompanied by tears, loss of talkativeness, and many such things which the common run of men are wont to find quite alien to them.

38. And here are the signs of those who are practising solitude in the wrong way: dearth of (spiritual) wealth, increase of anger, a hoard of resentment, diminution of love, growth of vanity; and I will be silent about all the rest which follow.[4]

39. But our chapter has now reached the point at which we must consider the case of those living in obedience; all the more so because this chapter is especially meant for them.

40. The signs of those who are lawfully, unadulterously and sincerely wedded to this orderly and fair obedience, both in reality and according to the teaching of the inspired Fathers, are these—and everyday (if only we have consecrated a day to the Lord)[5] they reach forward and obtain increase and progress so that they become perfect in due time: an increase of elementary humility, a lessening of bad

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[1] Cf. 'he was a burning and shining light' (St. John v, 35).

[2] The great work of quiet or contemplation is a means or cause of greater progress than the active life of a community. Pachomius's foundation at Tabennisi was famed for its cenobitic character, whereas the desert of Scete was a centre for solitaries in the fourth century and later.

[3] St. Matthew xix, 12. In the spiritual life we must begin with the humbler virtues and climb by them to the heights, just as a ladder is used to elevate one from a lower to a higher state.

[4] That is, 'I will be silent about bodily falls and mental derangements.'

[5] The words in brackets are missing in some Greek texts.

temper (for how can it not decrease as the gall is exhausted?), dissipation of darkness, access of love, estrangement from passions, deliverance from hatred, diminution of lust through continual scrutiny, ignorance of despondency, increase of zeal, compassionate love, banishment of pride. This is the achievement which all should seek, but few attain. A well without water does not deserve the name. And what follows, he who is capable of thought already knows.[1]

41. A young wife who has not been faithful to her marriage bed has defiled her body; and a soul who has not been faithful to his vow has defiled his spirit. Reproach, hatred, thrashings and, most wretched of all, separation will befall the first. The other will have to face: pollution, forgetfulness of death, insatiability of stomach, lack of control of the eyes, working for vainglory, pining for sleep, hardening of the heart, deadness and insensibility, rank growth of wrong thoughts and an inclination to allow them, captivity of the heart, disturbance of spirit, disobedience, contradiction, attachment, unbelief, scepticism, talkativeness and, worst of all, free familiarity; and still more wretched, a heart without compunction which in the negligent is followed by in difference, the mother of devils and falls.

42. Out of the eight evil spirits, five[2] assail those practising solitude, and three[3] those living in obedience.

43. He who is practising solitude and fighting despondency often suffers great harm, for he wastes time which should be given to prayer and contemplation in tricks and wrestlings to battle against it.

44. Once, having become slack, I was sitting in my cell and thinking of leaving it. But some people came to me and began to praise me not a little for my solitary life, and at once the thought of slackness gave place to the thought of vainglory. And I was amazed at how this three-horned demon opposes all the other spirits.

45. Observe every hour the slaps and flicks, the inclinations and changes of your companion (i.e. the spirit of despondency) and see how and where they are directed. He who has obtained calmness through the Holy Spirit is familiar with this spectacle.

46. The preliminary task of solitude is the disengagement from all affairs, whether laudable or not; for he who allows even laudable ones will certainly fall into those which are not. The second task of solitude is earnest prayer. And the third is inviolable activity of the heart.[4] It is physically impossible for one who does not know the alphabet to study books. It is still more impossible for one who has not attained to the first to pass in the right way to the last two tasks.

47. Engaged in the middle task, I was among the middle orders; and an angel enlightened me, thirsting as I was. And again I was among them, and when I asked: 'What was the Lord before He took visible form?' the angel could not tell me, for he was not allowed. So I asked him: 'In what state is He now?' He replied: 'In the state proper to Him, but not in this (our state).' I asked: What is the meaning of the standing and sitting on the right hand of the Father?' He said: 'It is impossible to grasp these mysteries by hearing with the human ear.' I implored him on the spot to lead me where my longings drew me,[5] and he said: 'The hour has not yet come, because the fire of incorruption does not yet burn sufficiently within you.' Whether I was then with this earth, I know not; or out of it—I am quite unable to say.[6]

48. It is difficult to overcome the midday nap, especially in the summer time; then, and perhaps only then, is manual work permissible.

49. In my experience the demon of despondency prepares and clears the way for the demon of lust, so that by violently weakening the body and plunging it in sleep the latter may produce pollutions in

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[1] That is, anyone lacking the signs or proofs just mentioned cannot be called obedient.

[2] I.e. pride, vainglory, sloth, despondency, and covetousness (cf. Step 26: 2).

[3] I.e. gluttony, anger, lust.

[4] That is, none of the activity is stolen or diverted to lower ends.

[5] I.e. to the vision of God.

[6] 2 Corinthians xii, 2 ff.

those practising solitude by means of a lifelike dream. If you resist these demons vigorously, then they will certainly launch a violent attack upon you in order to make you stop your labours on the ground that you are doing yourself no good. But nothing can prove the defeat of the demons so clearly as the violence with which they attack us.

50. When you come out of solitude, guard what you have gathered. When the cage is opened, the birds fly out. And then we shall find no further profit in solitude.

51. A small hair disturbs the eye, and a small care ruins solitude; because solitude is the banishment of thoughts and ideas, and the rejection of even laudable cares.

52. He who has really attained to solitude does not give a thought to his flesh; for He who has promised[1] will not prove false.

53. He who wishes to present his mind pure to God, and is agitated by cares, is like a man who has tied his legs tight together and then expects to walk briskly.

54. Those who are thoroughly versed in secular philosophy are indeed rare; but I affirm that those who have a divine knowledge of the philosophy of true solitude are still more rare.

55. He who has not yet known God is unfit for solitude and exposes himself to many dangers. Solitude chokes the inexperienced; not having tasted the sweetness of God, they waste time in being taken captive, robbed, made despondent and subjected to distractions.

56. He who has experienced the good which comes from prayer will shun crowds like a wild ass; for what, if not prayer, makes him like a wild ass and free from all contact with people?

57. He who is gripped by passions and lives in the desert allows his mind to listen to their chatter. So the holy elder, I mean George Arsilaites, who is not entirely unknown to your reverence,[2] once told me and taught me. He once directed my worthless soul and, guiding me towards solitude, he said: 'I have noticed that in the morning it is usually the demons of vainglory and concupiscence who make assaults upon us; at midday the demons of despondency, repining and anger; and in the evening, those dung loving tyrants of the wretched stomach!

58. It is better to live (as a cenobite) in poverty and obedience than to be a solitary who has no control of his mind.

59. He who has entered into solitude in the right way and does not see its daily reward is either practising it in the wrong way or else is being robbed of this by his self-esteem.

60. Solitude is unceasing worship and waiting upon God.

61. Let the remembrance of Jesus[3] be present with each breath, and then you will know the value of solitude.

62. For the monk under obedience self-will is the fall, but for the solitary it is a breach in prayer.

63. If you rejoice in having visitors to your cell, know that you are not taking a holiday from despondency alone, but from God.

64. The model for your prayer should be the widow who was wronged by her adversary,[4] and for your solitude—the great and angelic solitary Arsenius. Remember in your solitude the life of this great hermit, and see how often he sent away those who came to him, so as not to lose the better part.[5]

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[1] Hebrews x, 32. Cf. St. Matthew vi, 25-34.
[2] I.e. John, Abbot of Raithu.
[3] This patristic expression denotes the Prayer of Jesus and not the simple remembrance of the Name of Jesus.
[4] St. Luke xviii, i—8.
[5] I.e. Mary's part (cf. St. Luke x, 42).

65. My experience is that the demons often persuade foolish gadabouts to visit those living in solitude in the right way so as to use even such as those to throw some hindrance in the way of these active men. Look out for such people, and do not be afraid of offending these idle bodies by your devout behaviour; because, as a result of this offence, they will perhaps stop gadding about. But see that you do not mistakenly offend a soul who in his thirst has come to draw water from you. In all things you need the light (of discretion).

66. The life of those practising solitude, and especially those who are quite alone, should be guided by conscience and common sense. He who runs his race in the right way, and performs all his undertakings, utterances, thoughts, each step, every intention and every movement according to the Lord, works for the Lord's sake with spiritual fervour as though in the Lord's presence. If he is robbed, he is not yet living by the rules of virtue.

67. I will expound, says someone, my proposition and my will on the harp,[1] according to my still imperfect judgment. As for me, I shall offer my will to God in prayer, and from Him I shall receive assurance.

68. Faith is the wing of prayer; without it, my prayer will return again to my bosom. Faith is the unshaken firmness of the soul, unmoved by any adversity. A believer is not one who thinks that God can do everything, but one who believes that he will obtain all things. Faith paves the way for what seems impossible; and the thief proved this for himself.[2] The mother of faith is hardship and an honest heart; the latter makes faith constant, and the former builds it up. Faith is the mother of the solitary; for if he does not believe, how can he practise solitude?

69. He who is chained up in prison fears the judge who sentences him, but the hermit in his cell brings forth fear of the Lord; and the tribunal is not so terrifying to the former as the throne of the Judge is to the latter. You need great fear for solitude, excellent man, because nothing else is so effective in dispelling despondency. The convict is continually looking to see when the judge will come to the prison; and the true worker wonders when the angel of death will come. A burden of sorrow oppresses the former, but the latter has a fountain of tears.

70. Bring out the staff of patience, and the dogs will soon stop their insolence. Patience is a labour that does not crush the soul and never wavers under interruptions, laudable or the reverse. The patient man is a faultless worker, who turns his faults into victories. Patience is the limitation of suffering that is accepted day by day. Patience lays aside all excuses and all attention to herself. The worker[3] needs patience more than his food because the one brings him a crown, while the other may bring ruin. The patient man has died long before he is placed in the tomb, having made his cell his tomb. Hope engenders patience and so does mourning; but he who has neither is a slave to despondency.

71. Christ's warrior should know what foes to parry from a distance, and which to fight at close quarters. Sometimes the combat has earned a crown; sometimes refusal has made men reprobate. It is not feasible to lay down precepts in such matters, for we have not all got the same character or dispositions.

72. There is one spirit on which you should keep a vigilant eye; he is the one who assails you unceasingly during your standing, walking, sitting, movement, rising, prayer and sleep.

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[1] Psalm xlviii, 4.

[2] Cf. St. Luke xxiii, 42-3.

[3] I.e. the contemplative or practiser of solitude.

73. Not all loaves of the heavenly wheat of this spiritual food have the same appearance. Some people in the field of solitude ever cultivate within them this thought: I see the Lord before me continually;[1] but others: In your patience you will win your souls:[2] some: Watch and pray;[3] others: Prepare thy works for thy death;[4] some: I was humbled and he saved me;[5] some: The sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the future glory;[6] and others always have in mind the words: Lest he snatch you away and there be none to deliver you.[7] For all run, but one receives the prize[8] without effort.

74. He who makes progress works not only when awake but when asleep as well. So even in sleep some snub the demons who approach them and admonish dissolute women in the matter of chastity. But do not expect visits and do not prepare for them beforehand, because the state of solitude is perfectly simple and free.

75. No one intending to build a tower and cell of solitude will approach this work without first sitting down and counting the cost, and he will feel his way by prayer, considering whether he has within him the necessary means for completing it, so that he should not lay the foundation and then become a laughing-stock to his enemies and an obstacle to other workers.[9]

76. Examine the sweetness you feel in your soul, lest it be compounded craftily by cruel physicians, or rather treacherous ones.

77. Devote the greater part of the night to prayer and only what is left to recital of the psalter. And during the day again prepare yourself according to your strength.

78. Reading[10] enlightens the mind considerably, and helps it concentrate. For those are the Holy Spirit's words and they attune those who attend to them. Let what you read lead you to action, for you are a doer.[11] Putting these words into practice makes further reading superfluous. Seek to be enlightened by the words of salvation[12] through your labours, and not merely from books. Until you receive spiritual power do not study works of an allegorical nature because they are dark words, and they darken the weak.[13]

79. Often one cup of wine is sufficient to reveal its flavour, and one word of the solitary makes known to those who can taste it his whole inner state and activity.

80. Have the eye of your soul fixed firm against conceit or self-opinion, for nothing is so banefully destructive.

81. When you leave your cell be sparing with your tongue, because it can scatter in a moment the fruits of many labours.

82. Try to unlearn officiousness and curiosity; for they can spoil solitude as nothing else can.

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[1] Psalm xv, 8.
[2] St. Luke xxi, 19.
[3] St. Matthew xxvi, 43.
[4] Proverbs xxiv, 27.
[5] Psalm cxiv, 5.
[6] Romans viii, 18.
[7] Psalm xlix, 22.
[8] 1 Corinthians ix, 24.
[9] St. Luke xiv, 28-30.
[10] I.e. Holy Scripture.
[11] James i, 22.
[12] Lit. 'by the words of health'.
[13] Anagogical writings appear to mean one thing, but in reality mean something quite different. Being words of darkness, or at any rate puzzling and unclear, they may injure those who cannot go beyond the letter and proceed in the Spirit, being taken at their face value, as the Song of Songs and such like.

83. Offer to those who visit you what is necessary both for the body and for the spirit. If they are wiser than we are, let us show our philosophy by silence. And if they are brethren following the same way of life, let us open the door of speech to them in due measure. Yet it is better to regard all as superior to us.[1]

84. I wanted to forbid to those who were still children all bodily work at the time of the church services,[2] but he who carried sand all night in his cloak restrained me.[3]

85. What is said in the dogma of the holy, uncreated and adorable Trinity contrasts with the doctrine of the providential Incarnation of One of the Persons of this all-hymned Trinity—for what is plural in the Trinity is single in Him; and what there is single, here is plural.[4] And in the same way some habits of life are suitable for solitude and others for obedience (in a community).

86. The divine Apostle says: Who has known the mind of the Lord?[5] And I will say: Who has known the mind of the man who is a solitary in body and spirit?

87. The power of a king consists in his wealth and the number of his subjects; the power of a solitary in abundance of prayer.

Step 28

On holy and blessed prayer, mother of virtues, and on the attitude of mind and body in prayer.

1. Prayer by reason of its nature is the converse and union of man with God, and by reason of its action upholds the world and brings about reconciliation with God; it is the mother and also the daughter of tears, the propitiation for sins, a bridge over temptations, a wall against afflictions, a crushing of conflicts, work of angels, food of all the spiritual beings, future gladness, boundless activity, the spring of virtues, the source of graces, invisible progress, food of the soul, the enlightening of the mind, an axe for despair, a demonstration of hope, the annulling of sorrow, the wealth of monks, the treasure of solitaries, the reduction of anger, the mirror of progress, the realization of success, a proof of one's condition, a revelation of the future, a sign of glory. For him who truly prays, prayer is the court, the judgment hall and the tribunal of the Lord before the judgment to come.

2. Let us rise and listen to what that holy queen of the virtues cries with a loud voice and says to us: Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and you shall find rest for your souls and healing for your wounds. For My yoke is easy[6] and is a sovereign remedy for great sins.

3. If we wish to stand before our King and God and converse with Him we must not rush into this without preparation, lest, seeing us from afar without weapons and suitable clothing for those who stand before the King, He should order His servants and slaves to seize us and banish us from His presence and tear up our petitions and throw them in our face.

4. When you are going to stand before the Lord, let the garment of your soul be woven throughout with the thread that has become oblivious of wrongs. Otherwise, prayer will bring you no benefit.

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[1] Philippians ii, 3.
[2] Lit. 'in the gatherings', or 'assemblies'.
[3] St. Pachomius thus resisted sleep and remained in vigil.
[4] In the Holy Trinity there are three Persons, but in Christ one Person; in the Trinity there is one nature, but in Christ two natures.
[5] Romans xi, 34.
[6] St. Matthew xi, 28-30.

5. Let your prayer be completely simple. For both the publican and the prodigal son were reconciled to God by a single phrase.

6. The attitude of prayer is one and the same for all, but there are many kinds of prayer and many different prayers. Some converse with God as with a friend and master, interceding with praise and petition not for themselves but for others. Some strive for more (spiritual) riches and glory and for confidence in prayer. Others ask for complete deliverance from their adversary.[1] Some beg to receive some kind of rank; others for complete forgiveness of debts. Some ask to be released from prison; others for remission of accusations.

7. Before all else let us list sincere thanksgiving first on our prayer-card. On the second line we should put confession, and heartfelt contrition of soul. Then let us present our petition to the King of all. This is the best way of prayer, as it was shown to one of the brethren by an angel of the Lord.

8. If you have ever been under trial before an earthly judge, you will not need any other pattern for your attitude in prayer. But if you have never stood before a judge yourself and have not seen others being cross-questioned, then learn at least from the way the sick implore the surgeons when they are about to be operated on or cauterized.

9. Do not be over-sophisticated in the words you use when praying, because the simple and unadorned lisping of children has often won the heart of their heavenly Father.

10. Do not attempt to talk much when you pray lest your mind be distracted in searching for words. One word of the publican propitiated God, and one cry of faith saved the thief. Loquacity in prayer often distracts the mind and leads to phantasy, whereas brevity[2] makes for concentration.

11. If you feel sweetness or compunction at some word of your prayer, dwell on it; for then our guardian angel is praying with us.

12. Do not be bold, even though you may have attained purity; but rather approach with great humility, and you will receive still more boldness.

13. Though you may have climbed the whole ladder of the virtues, pray for forgiveness of sins. Listen to the cry of Paul regarding sinners: Of whom I am the first.[3]

14. Oil and salt are seasonings for food; and tears and chastity give wings to prayer.

15. If you are clothed in all meekness and freedom from anger, you will not have much trouble in loosing your mind from captivity.

16. Until we have acquired genuine prayer we are like people teaching children to begin to walk.

17. Try to lift up, or rather, to shut off your thought within the words of your prayer, and if in its infant state it wearies and falls, lift it up again. Instability is natural to the mind, but God is powerful to establish everything. If you persevere indefatigably in this labour, He who sets the bounds to the sea of the mind will visit you too, and during your prayer will say to the waves: Thus far shalt thou come and no further.[4] Spirit cannot be bound; but where the Creator of the spirit is, everything obeys.

18. If you have ever seen the Sun[5] as you ought, you will also be able to converse with Him fitly. But if not, how can you truly hold converse with what you have not seen?

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[1] Cf. Step 5: 25.

[2] Gk. *monologia*, repetition of a single word or sentence.

[3] 1 Timothy i 15.

[4] Job xxxviii, 11

[5] I.e. God, the Sun of Righteousness.

19. The beginning of prayer consists in banishing the thoughts that come to us by single ejaculations[1] the very moment that they appear; the middle stage consists in confining our minds to what is being said and thought; and its perfection is rapture in the Lord.

20. One kind of joy occurs at the time of prayer for those living in a community, and another comes to those who pray as solitaries. The one is perhaps somewhat elated, but the other is wholly filled with humility.

21. If you constantly train your mind never to wander, then it will be near you during meals too. But if it wanders unrestrained, then it will never stay beside you. A great practiser of high and perfect prayer says: 'I would rather speak five words with my understanding,'[2] and so on. But such prayer is foreign to infant souls. Therefore, imperfect as we are, we need not only quality but a considerable time for our prayer, because the latter paves the way for the former. For it is said: 'Giving pure prayer to him who prays[3] resolutely, even though sordidly and laboriously.'

22. Soiled prayer is one thing, its disappearance is another, robbery another, and defection another. Prayer is soiled when we stand before God and picture to ourselves irrelevant and inopportune thoughts. Prayer is lost when we are captured by useless cares. Prayer is stolen from us when our thoughts wander before we realize it. Prayer is spoilt by any kind of attack or interruption that comes to us at the time of prayer.

23. If we are not alone at the time of prayer, then let us imprint within ourselves the character of one who prays. But if the ministers of praise are not with us, we may make even our outward attitude conform to a state of prayer. For in the case of the imperfect, the mind often conforms to the body.

24. For everyone, and especially for those who have come to the King in order to receive remission of their debt, unutterable contrition is necessary. As long as we are still in prison let us listen to Him who speaks to Peter:[4] Put on the garment of obedience, cast off your own wishes and, stripped of them, approach the Lord in your prayer, invoking His will alone. Then you will receive God, who guides the helm of your soul and pilots you safely.

25. Rise from love of the world and love of pleasure, lay aside cares, strip your mind, renounce your body; because prayer is nothing other than estrangement from the world, visible and invisible. For what have I in heaven? Nothing. And what have I desired on earth beside Thee? Nothing, but to cling continually to Thee in prayer without distraction. To some, wealth is pleasant, to others, glory, to others, possessions, but my wish is to cling to God, and to put the hope[5] of my dispassion in Him.

26. Faith gives wings to prayer, and without it we cannot fly up to heaven.

27. We who are passionate must constantly pray to the Lord. For all passionate people who have achieved dispassion have only done so by vanquishing their passions.

28. Though the judge did not fear God, yet because a soul, widowed from Him through sin and a fall, troubles Him, He will avenge her of her adversary, the body, and of the spirits who make war upon her.[6] Our good Redeemer attracts to His love those who are charitable by the quick satisfaction of their petitions. But He makes thoughtless souls remain in prayer before Him for a long time, in hunger and thirst for their petition; for an ill-conditioned cur when once it gets its bread makes off with it and leaves the giver.

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[1] Gk. *monologistōs*. This may mean by single words of prayer.

[2] 1 Corinthians xiv, 19; the passage continues, 'than the thousand words in a tongue'.

[3] Kings ii, 9 (the Septuagint differs from the A.V. and R.V. here).

[4] Cf. Acts xii, 8.

[5] Psalm lxxii, 25—8.

[6] St. Luke xviii, 1—7.

29. Do not say, after spending a long time at prayer, that nothing has been gained; for you have already gained something. And what higher good is there than to cling to the Lord and persevere in unceasing union with Him?

30. A convict does not fear his sentence of punishment so much as a fervent man of prayer fears this duty of prayer. So if he is wise and shrewd, by remembering this he can avoid every reproach, and anger, and worry, and interruption, and affliction, and satiety, and temptation, and distracting thought.

31. Prepare yourself for your set times of prayer by unceasing prayer in your soul, and you will soon make progress. I have seen those who shone in obedience and who tried, as far as they could, to keep in mind the remembrance of God, and the moment they stood in prayer they were at once masters of their minds, and shed streams of tears; because they were prepared for this beforehand by holy obedience.

32. Psalmody in a crowded congregation is accompanied by captivity and wandering of thoughts; but in solitude this does not happen. However, those in solitude are liable to be assailed by despondency, whereas in the former the brethren help each other by their zeal.

33. War proves the soldier's love for his king; but the time and discipline of prayer show the monk's love for God.

34. Your prayer will show you what condition you are in. Theologians say that prayer is the monk's mirror.

35. He who is busy with something and continues it when the hour of prayer comes, is deceived by the demons. Those thieves aim at stealing from us one hour after another.

36. Do not beg off when asked to pray for the soul of another, even though you have not yet obtained the gift of prayer; because the faith of the suppliant also frequently saves the one who prays for him with contrition.

37. Do not get excited if you have prayed for another and been heard, for it is his faith that has been strong and effective.

38. Each lesson that a child learns from his teacher he will be expected to know day by day without fail; and it is right that a reckoning should be required of each prayer that we engage in, so that we know what power has been received from God. Therefore, we must attend to the matter. When you have prayed soberly, you will soon be fighting against fits of temper. For this is what our enemies aim at.

39. We should always perform every virtue, especially prayer, with great feeling. A soul prays with feeling when it gets the better of temper and anger.

40. What is obtained by frequent and prolonged prayer is lasting.

41. He who has found the Lord will no longer explain the object of his prayer, for then the Spirit Himself makes intercession for him within him with unutterable groanings.[1]

42. During prayer do not admit any sensory imagination, so as not to be subject to distraction.

43. The assurance of every petition becomes evident during prayer. Assurance is loss of doubt. Assurance is sure proof of the unprovable.

44. Be very merciful if you care about prayer. For through mercy monks shall receive a hundredfold,[2] and the rest in the future life.

45. When the fire comes to dwell in the heart, it revives prayer; and after its resurrection and ascension to heaven, a descent of fire into the cenacle of the soul takes place.

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[1] Romans viii, 26.

[2] St. Matthew xix, 29.

46. Some say that prayer is better than the remembrance of death, but I praise two natures in one person.[1]

47. A good horse when mounted warms up and quickens its pace. By pace I mean psalm-singing; and by horse, a resolute mind. He scents the battle from afar,[2] he is all ready, and remains master of the field.

48. It is cruel to snatch water from the mouth of a thirsty person but it is still more cruel for a soul that is praying with compunction to be torn away from its beloved task before it has finished its prayer.

49. Do not abandon prayer until you see that, by divine providence, the fire and water[3] have fallen off. For you will not have such a moment for the remission of your sins again in all your life perhaps.

50. By blurting out one careless word he who has tasted prayer often defiles his mind, and then when he stands in prayer he no longer attains his desire as before.

51. It is one thing frequently to keep watch over the heart, and another to supervise the heart by means of the mind, that ruler and bishop that offers spiritual sacrifices to Christ. When the holy and heavenly fire comes to dwell in the souls of the former, as says one of those who have received the title of Theologian,[4] it burns them because they still lack purification, whereas it enlightens the latter according to the degree of their perfection. For one and the same fire is called both the fire which consumes and the light which illuminates.[5] That is why some people come from prayer as if they were marching out of a fiery furnace and feel relief as from some defilement and from all that is material, while others are as if illumined with light and clothed in a garment of joy and humility. But those who come from prayer without experiencing either of these two effects have prayed bodily (not to say after the Jewish fashion), and not spiritually.

52. If a body is changed in its activity from contact with another body, then how can he remain unchanged who touches the body of God with innocent hands?[6]

53. We see that our all-good King, like an earthly king, sometimes distributes His gifts to his warriors Himself, sometimes through a friend, sometimes through a slave, and sometimes in an unknown way; and it will be according to the garment of humility that each of us wears.

54. Just as an earthly king is disgusted by a man who turns his face away and talks to his master's enemies while in his presence, so will the Lord be disgusted by a man who admits unclean thoughts during his set time of prayer.

55. Drive away with this stick the dog that keeps on coming, and however often he tries it on, never give in to him.

56. Ask with tears, seek with obedience, knock with patience. For thus he who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.[7]

57. Take care when you pray not to overdo your intercessions for the other sex, so as not to be tricked from the right side.[8]

58. Do not go into detail in confessing physical acts lest you become a traitor to yourself.

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[1] A loving nature (prayer) and a fearful nature (remembrance of death), just as Christ has His divine and human natures united in one Person.

[2] Job xxxix, 25.

[3] I.e. fervour and tears.

[4] St. Gregory Nazianzen, *Or*. 40.

[5] Hebrews xii, 29; St. John 1, 9.

[6] This refers to the power of the Body of Christ in Holy Communion.

[7] St. Matthew vii, 8.

[8] The shield being on the left arm, the right was the unguarded side.

59. Do not let the time of prayer be an hour for considering necessary things or even spiritual tasks, otherwise you will lose the better part.[1]

60. He who keeps constant hold of the staff of prayer will not stumble. And even if he does, his fall will not be fatal. For prayer is a devout coercion of God.[2]

61. The benefit of prayer can be inferred from the assaults of the demons during the divine office; and its fruit from the defeat of the foe. But this I know that Thou favourest me because my enemy will never triumph over me[3] in the time of battle. I called with my whole heart, says the Psalmist,[4] that is, with body, soul and spirit. For where the two last are gathered together, there God is in the midst of them.[5]

62. We have not all got the same needs, neither as regards the body nor as regards the spirit. For brisk chanting suits some, and more leisurely singing suits others. For the former are struggling with captivity of the mind, and the latter with ignorance.

63. If you constantly converse with the King concerning your enemies, take courage when they attack you. You will not labour long, for they will soon retire of their own accord. These unholy spirits do not want to see you receive a crown for your struggle against them through prayer. And moreover, they will flee as from fire when scourged by prayer.

64. Have all courage, and you will have God for your teacher in prayer. Just as it is impossible to learn to see by word of mouth because seeing depends on one's own natural sight, so it is impossible to realize the beauty of prayer from the teaching of others. Prayer has a Teacher all its own—God---who teaches man knowledge,[6] and grants the prayer of him who prays, and blesses the years of the just.[7] Amen.

Step 29

Concerning heaven on earth, or godlike dispassion and perfection, and the resurrection of the soul before the general resurrection.

1. Here are we who lie in the deepest pit of ignorance, in the dark passions of this body and in the shadow of death, having the temerity to begin to philosophize about heaven on earth.

2. The firmament has the stars for its beauty, and dispassion has the virtues for its adornments; for by dispassion I mean no other than the interior heaven of the mind, which regards the tricks of the demons as mere toys.

3. And so he is truly dispassionate, and is recognized as dispassionate, who has made his flesh incorruptible, who has raised his mind above creatures and has subdued all his senses to it, and who keeps his soul in the presence of the Lord, ever reaching out to Him even beyond his strength.

4. Some say, moreover, that dispassion is the resurrection of the soul before the body; but others, that it is the perfect knowledge of God, second only to that of the angels.

5. This perfect, but still unfinished, perfection of the perfect, as someone who had tasted it informed me, so sanctifies the mind and detaches it from material things that for a considerable part of life in the

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[1] Cf. St. Luke x, 42.
[2] St. Luke xviii, 5.
[3] Psalm xl, 12.
[4] Psalm cxviii, 145.
[5] St. Matthew xviii, 20. The *two* are soul and spirit.
[6] Psalm xciii, 10.
[7] Kings ii, 9 (cf. above, p. 121, note 474).

flesh, after entering the heavenly harbour, a man is rapt as though in Heaven and is raised to contemplation. One who had experience of this well says somewhere: For God's strong men of the earth have become greatly exalted.[1] Such a man, as we know, was that Egyptian[2] who prayed with some people for a long time without relaxing his hands which were stretched out in prayer.

6. There is a dispassionate man, and there is one who is more dispassionate than the dispassionate. The one strongly hates what is evil, but the other has an inexhaustible store of virtues.

7. Purity too is called dispassion; and rightly, because it is the harbinger of the general resurrection and of the incorruption of the corruptible.

8. Dispassion was shown by him who said: I have the mind of the Lord.[3] Dispassion was shown by the Egyptian[4] who said that he no longer feared the Lord. Dispassion was shown by him who prayed that his passions should return to him.[5] Who before the future glory has been granted such dispassion as that Syrian?[6] For David, glorious among the prophets, says to the Lord: O spare me, that I may recover my strength;[7] but that athlete of God cries: 'Spare me from the waves of Thy grace.'

9. The soul has dispassion who is immersed in the virtues as the passionate are in pleasures.

10. If it is the acme of gluttony to force oneself to eat even when one has no appetite, then it is certainly the acme of temperance for a hungry man to overcome nature when it is blameless.[8] If it is extreme sensuality to rave over irrational and even inanimate creatures, then it is extreme purity to hold all persons in the same regard as inanimate things. If it is the height of cupidity to go on collecting and never be satisfied, it is the height of poverty not to spare even one's own body. If it is the height of despondency, while living in complete peace, not to acquire patience, then it is the height of patience to think of oneself even in affliction as being at rest. If it is called a sea of wrath for a person to be savage even when no one is about, then it will be a sea of long-suffering to be as calm in the presence of your slanderer as in his absence. If it is the height of vainglory when a person, seeing no one near him to praise him, puts on affected behaviour, it is certainly a mark of its absence, not to let your thought be beguiled in the presence of those who praise you. If it is a sign of perdition (that is to say, pride) to be arrogant even in poor clothing, then it is a mark of saving humility to have humble thoughts in the midst of high undertakings and achievements. If it is a sign of complete enslavement to the passions to yield readily to everything the demons sow in us, then I take it as a mark of holy dispassion to be able to say honestly: The evil one who dodges me, I have not known;[9] nor how he came, nor why, nor how he went; but I am completely unaware of everything of this kind, because I am wholly united with God, and always will be.

11. He who has been granted such a state, while still in the flesh, always has God dwelling within him as his Guide in all his words, deeds and thoughts. Therefore, through illumination he apprehends the Lord's will as a sort of inner voice. He is above all human instruction and says: When shall I come and appear before the face of God?[10] For I can no longer bear the force of love; I long for the immortal beauty which Thou hast given me in exchange for this clay.

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[1] Psalm xlvi, 10.
[2] St. Moses the Ethiopian or Abba Tithoe.
[3] Cf. 1 Corinthians ii, 16; vii, 40.
[4] St. Antony the Great.
[5] St. John Kolov.
[6] St. Ephraim the Syrian.
[7] Psalm xxxviii, 14.
[8] The point is, it is the height of temperance or self-control to master hunger which betokens a real need of nature and is therefore blameless.
[9] Psalm c, 4.
[10] Psalm xli, 3.

12. But why say more? The dispassionate man no longer lives himself, but Christ lives in[1] him, as he says who fought the good fight, finished his course and kept the faith.[2]

13. A king's diadem is not composed of one stone, and dispassion does not reach perfection if we neglect even one virtue, however ordinary.

14. Imagine dispassion as the celestial palace of the Heavenly King; and the many mansions[3] as the abodes within this city, and the wall of this celestial Jerusalem as the forgiveness of sins. Let us run, brethren, let us run to enter the bridal hall of this palace. If we are prevented by anything, by some burden or old habit, or by time itself what a disaster! Let us at least occupy one of those mansions around the palace. But if we sink down and grow weak, let us make sure of being at least within the walls. For he who does not enter there before his end, or rather, does not scale the wall, will lie out in the desert of fiends and passions. That is why a certain man prayed, saying: Through my God I shall scale the wall.[4] And another says as if in the person of God: Is it not your sins that separate you from Me?[5] Friends, let us break through this wall of separation which we have erected to our own harm by disobedience; and let us receive the forgiveness of our sins, because in hell there is no one to pardon our debts. So then, brethren, let us devote ourselves to our task, for we are on the roll of the devout. There is no room for any excuse whether of a fall, or opportunity, or burden. For to all who have received the Lord by the baptism of regeneration He has given power to be come children of God,[6] saying: Be still and know that I am God[7] and am Dispassion. To Him be the glory for ever and ever! Amen.

Blessed dispassion lifts the mind that is poor from earth to heaven, and raises the beggar from the dunghill of the passions. But love whose praise is above all makes him sit with the princes, with the holy angels, and with the princes of the people of God.[8]

Step 30

Concerning the linking together of the supreme trinity among the virtues.[9]

1. And now, finally, after all that we have said, there remain these three that bind and secure the union of all, faith, hope, love; and the greatest of these is love,[10] for God Himself is so called.[11]

2. And (as far as I can make out) I see the one as a ray, the second as a light, the third as a circle; and in all, one radiance and one splendour.

3. The first can make and create all things; the divine mercy surrounds the second and makes it immune to disappointment; the third does not fall, does not stop in its course and allows no respite to him who is wounded by its blessed rapture.

4. He who wishes to speak about divine love undertakes to speak about God. But it is precarious to expatiate on God, and may even be dangerous for the unwary.

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[1] Galatians ii, 20.
[2] 2 Timothy iv, 7. Some texts add 'orthodox' before the word 'faith'.
[3] St. John xiv, 2.
[4] Psalm xvii, 30.
[5] Cf. Isaiah lix, 2.
[6] St. John i, 12.
[7] Psalm xlv, 11.
[8] Psalm cxii, 7—8.
[9] I.e. faith, hope and love.
[10] 1 Corinthians xiii, 13.
[11] 1 John iv, 8, 16.

5. The angels know how to speak about love, and even they can only do this according to the degree of their enlightenment.

6. God is love. So he who wishes to define this, tries with bleary eyes to measure the sand in the ocean.

7. Love, by reason of its nature, is a resemblance to God, as far as that is possible for mortals; in its activity it is inebriation of the soul; and by its distinctive property it is a fountain of faith, an abyss of patience, a sea of humility.

8. Love is essentially the banishment of every kind of contrary thought for love thinks no evil.[1]

9. Love, dispassion and adoption are distinguished as sons from one another by name, and name only. Just as light, fire and flame combine to form one power, it is the same with love, dispassion and adoption.

10. As love wanes, fear appears; because he who has no fear is either filled with love or dead in soul.

11. There is nothing wrong in representing desire, and fear, and care and zeal and service and love for God in images borrowed from human life. Blessed is he who has obtained such love and yearning for God as an enraptured lover has for his beloved. Blessed is he who fears the Lord as much as men under trial fear the judge. Blessed is he who is as zealous with true zeal as a well-disposed slave towards his master. Blessed is he who has become as jealous of the virtues as husbands who remain in unsleeping watch over their wives out of jealousy. Blessed is he who stands in prayer before the Lord as servants stand before a king. Blessed is he who unceasingly strives to please the Lord as others try to please men.

12. Even a mother does not so cling to the babe at her breast as a son of love clings to the Lord at all times.

13. He who truly loves ever keeps in his imagination the face of his beloved, and there embraces it tenderly. Such a man can get no relief from his strong desire even in sleep, even then he holds converse with his loved one. So it is with our bodily nature; and so it is in spirit. One who was wounded with love said of himself (I wonder at it): I sleep because nature requires this, but my heart is awake[2] in the abundance of my love.

14. You should notice, venerable brother, that the stag—the soul—having destroyed those reptiles,[3] longs and faints[4] for the Lord with the fire of love, as if struck by an arrow.

15. The effect of hunger is vague and indefinite; but the effect of thirst is intense and obvious to all, and indicative of blazing heat. So one who yearns for God says: My soul thirsts for God, the strong, the living God.[5]

16. If the face of a loved one clearly and completely changes us, and makes us cheerful, gay and carefree, what will the Face of the Lord not do when He makes His Presence felt invisibly in a pure soul?

17. Fear when it is an inner conviction of the soul destroys and devours impurity, for it is said: Nail down my flesh with the fear of Thee.[6] And holy love consumes some, according to him who said: Thou hast ravished our heart, Thou hast ravished our heart.[7] But sometimes it makes others bright and

[1] 1 Corinthians xiii, 5.
[2] Song of Songs v, 2.
[3] See above, p. 108, note 413.
[4] Psalm lxxxiii, 2.
[5] Psalm xli, 3.
[6] Psalm cxviii, 120.
[7] Song of Songs iv, 9.

joyful, for it is said: My heart trusted in Him and I have been helped; even my flesh has revived;[1] and: When the heart is happy the face is cheerful.[2] So when the whole man is in a manner commingled with the love of God, then even his outward appearance in the body, as in a kind of mirror, shows the splendour of his soul. That is how Moses who had looked upon God was glorified.[3]

18. Those who have reached such an angelic state often forget about bodily food. I think that often they do not even feel any desire for it. And no wonder, for frequently a contrary desire knocks out the thought of food.

19. I think that the body of those incorruptible men is not even subject to sickness any longer, because it has been rendered incorruptible; for they have purified the inflammable flesh in the flame of purity. I think that even the food that is set before them they accept without any pleasure. For there is an underground stream that nourishes the root of a plant, and their souls too are sustained by a celestial fire.

20. The growth of fear is the beginning of love, but a complete state of purity is the foundation of divine knowledge.[4]

21. He who has perfectly united his feeling to God is mystically led by Him to an understanding of His words. But without this union it is difficult to speak about God.

22. The engrafted Word[5] perfects purity, and slays death by His presence; and after the slaying of death, the disciple of divine knowledge is illumined.

23. The Word of the Lord which is from God the Father is pure, and remains so eternally. But he who has not come to know God merely speculates.

24. Purity makes its disciple a theologian, who of himself grasps the dogmas of the Trinity.

25. He who loves the Lord has first loved his brother, because the second is a proof of the first.

26. One who loves his neighbour can never tolerate slanderers, but rather runs from them as from fire.

27. He who says that he loves the Lord but is angry with his brother is like a man who dreams that he is running.

28. The power of love is in hope, because by it we await the reward of love.

29. Hope is a wealth of hidden riches. Hope is a treasure of assurance of the treasure in store for us.

30. It is a rest from labours; it is the door of love; it is the superannuation of despair; it is an image of what is absent.

31. The failure of hope is the disappearance of love. Toils are bound by it. Labours depend on it. Mercy encircles it.

32. A monk of good hope is a slayer of despondency; with this sword he routs it.

33. Experience of the Lord's gift engenders hope; he who is without experience remains in doubt.

34. Anger destroys hope, because hope does not disappoint,[6] but a passionate man has no grace.[7]

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[1] Psalm xxvii, 7.
[2] Proverbs xv, 13.
[3] Cf. Exodus xxxiv; 2 Corinthians iii, 14.
[4] Lit. 'theology'.
[5] Cf. James i, 21. Another reading is: 'the consubstantial Word'.
[6] Romans v, 5.
[7] Or, 'an angry man is not beautiful' (Proverbs xi, 25).

35. Love bestows prophecy; love yields miracles; love is an abyss of illumination; love is a fountain of fire—in the measure that it bubbles up, it inflames the thirsty soul. Love is the state of angels. Love is the progress of eternity.

36. Tell us, fairest of virtues, where thou feedest thy flock, where thou restest at noon.[1] Enlighten us, quench our thirst, guide us, take us by the hand; for we wish at last to soar to thee. Thou rulest over all. And now thou hast ravished my soul. I cannot contain thy flame. So I will go forward praising thee. Thou rulest the power of the sea, and stillest the surge of its waves and puttest it to death. Thou hast humbled the proud—the proud thought—like a wounded man. With the arm of thy power thou hast scattered thy enemies,[2] and thou hast made thy lovers invincible.

But I long to know how Jacob saw thee fixed above the ladder. Satisfy my desire, tell me, What are the means of such an ascent? What the manner, what the law that joins together the steps which thy lover sets as an ascent in his heart?[3] I thirst to know the number of those steps, and the time needed for the ascent. He who knows the struggle and the vision has told us of the guides. But he would not, or rather, he could not, enlighten us any further.

And this queen (or I think I might more properly say king), as if appearing to me from heaven and as if speaking in the ear of my soul, said: Unless, beloved, you renounce your gross flesh, you cannot know my beauty. May this ladder teach you the spiritual combination of the virtues. On the top of it I have established myself, as my great initiate said: And now there remain faith, hope, love—these three; but the greatest of all is love.[4]

A BRIEF EXHORTATION SUMMARIZING ALL THAT HAS BEEN SAID AT LENGTH IN THIS BOOK

Ascend, brothers, ascend eagerly, and be resolved in your hearts to ascend[5] and hear Him who says: Come and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord and to the house of our God, who makes our feet like hind's feet, and sets us on high places,[6] that we may be victorious with His song.

Run, I beseech you, with him who said: Let us hasten until we attain to the unity of faith and of the knowledge of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,[7] who, when He was baptized in the thirtieth year of His visible age, attained the thirtieth step in the spiritual ladder; since God is indeed love, to whom be praise, dominion, power, in whom is and was and will be the cause of all goodness throughout infinite ages. Amen.

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[1] Song of Songs I, 6.
[2] Psalm lxxxviii, 9—10.
[3] Psalm lxxxiii, 4.
[4] 1 Corinthians xiii, 13.
[5] Cf. Psalm lxxxiii, 6.
[6] Isaiah ii, 3; Psalm xvii, 34.
[7] Ephesians iv, 13.